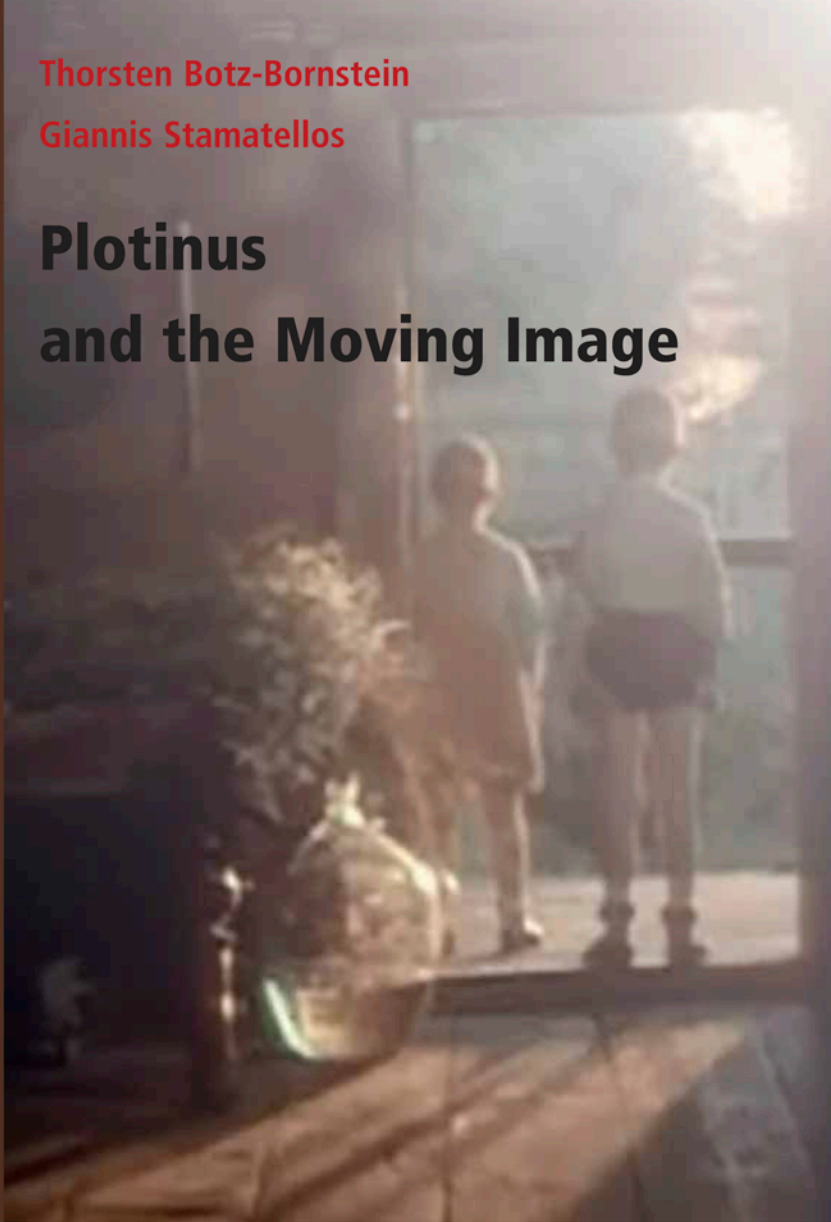


Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

Giannis Stamatellos

Plotinus and the Moving Image



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Plotinus and the Moving Image

Edited by

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein
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Contents

Note on the Cover Illustration VII

Preface VIII

Nathan Andersen

Notes on Contributors X

Introduction 1

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein and Giannis Stamatellos

**1 “Cut Away Excess and Straighten the Crooked:” The Simplicity of
Contemplative Cinema in the Light of Plotinus’ Philosophy** 8

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

2 The One in *Photogénie*: Plotinus and Jean Epstein 28

Steve Choe

3 Is the Universe a Work of Art that We Can Perceive in a Film? 44

Tony Partridge

4 Heracles, Hylas, and the Uses of Reflection 67

Stephen R.L. Clark

5 Beyond the Moving Images: A Plotinian Reading of

The Truman Show 91

Giannis Stamatellos

**6 Being as Illumination of the One and Its Manifestation through
Cinematic Images** 105

Sebastian F. Moro Tornese

7 Moving Image and Conversion: A Neoplatonic Film Theory 123

Vincenzo Lomuscio

8 Character, Spectator, Film: On Cinema as a Plotinian Hierarchy 144

Enrico Terrone

- 9 Plotinus and Tarkovsky on Experience and the Transparency of Reality 158
Daniel Regnier
- 10 Images of a Moving Self: Plotinus and Bruce Nauman 187
Panayiota Vassilopoulou
- 11 Avoiding the “Dead Thing Decorated.” Neoplatonism and *Daniel Martin*: Towards a Poetics of Film? 210
Michelle Phillips Buchberger
- 12 The Mystical and the Beautiful: The Construction of a Plotinian Aesthetics of Film 229
Cameron Barrows
- Filmography 243
- Index 245

Note on the Cover Illustration

Giannis Stamatellos

The book cover shows a still from Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*. The children have just been told by their mother that the neighbor's house is burning. While they are looking at the fire, the camera films their reflection in a mirror. Plotinus uses the metaphor of matter (*hylē*) as a mirror upon which corporeal beings are reflected (*Enneads* III 6, 7–13; IV 3, 12; V 1, 9). The perceptibles are “images drawn on the shadow” (*Ennead* VI 3, 8, 35–36); they are projected images of the soul on matter, reflections of the Forms that slip away on the mirror of matter like an “echo from smooth flat surfaces” (*Ennead* III 6, 14, 25). This scene of Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* could be interpreted as a metaphor of Plotinus' hypostases and his theory of contemplation. The children are looking at the burning fire; they are minds contemplating the phantasmagoric presence of the One. The camera acts like a soul that contemplates both children's vision and the dreamlike radiances of the One reflected on the mirror of matter. The perspective of the camera is the cinematographic vision of the director and by extension of the audience, following an autobiographical reminiscence of the soul and an inner sight of the soul's return (*epistrophē*) to innocence. The camera filming this moment is a soul returning to its own self. The audience contemplates a hypostatic enlightenment of being from the supreme ineffability of the One's light to the illuminating realm of intelligible reflections at the edges of matter.

Preface

Philosophy, according to Plato, begins in wonder, and films naturally evoke wonder. While some may seem at best entertaining distractions, the best manage to draw audiences up from their ordinary preoccupations and into a state of active reflection and focused contemplation. Manifestly unreal, the moving images of cinema nevertheless evoke reality and provoke reflection on the relationship between what is real and what is merely apparent. It is, perhaps, no accident that one of the most potent images from the history of philosophy, Plato's allegory of the cave, seems to anticipate cinema, by depicting the human condition in a way that resembles the condition of the audience in a movie theater. We are, according to the allegory, like prisoners seated in a darkened cave, fascinated by shadows that we consider to be real. Yet we have an advantage in the cinema, since we know it isn't real, and yet while we are not captive we remain captivated. Since, according to the allegory, it is the task of philosophy to alert the prisoners that what they consider to be real is an appearance, we might say that in the cinema we exist already in the condition of an openness to philosophical insight. The difference is that to pursue such insights through film requires not that we turn away from cinematic appearances, leaving the shadows behind and escaping the cave, but that, like the philosopher who reluctantly returns to the cave, we remain among the shadows and discern the truth within them. It requires that we not look behind or beyond appearances for truths divorced from experience, but that we uncover the traces of truth within appearance.

In the wake of Plato's thought, Plotinus provides us with an equally rich account of the relation between what we might conceive of as the ultimate reality responsible for appearances and the finite and changing world in which we find ourselves, and of which, alone, we are aware. Whatever we might want to call the ultimate reality, we cannot characterize or conceive of it in any way that would differentiate it from or oppose it to something else. That would be to impose limits on the unlimited. It simply is. If we are to characterize it at all we should emphasize its oneness with itself. It is, just, "the One." Yet, its oneness cannot be conceived in such a way as to oppose it to "the many" or to think of it as something other than or apart from the manifold and changing realities that are manifestly not ultimate. Plotinus suggests that the relationship between the One unchanging truth of reality and its manifold manifestations is like that between a source and the stream that overflows it. The realities of which we are aware and in which we participate flow or emanate from the One.

This image, like that of the cave, can also be given a more cinematic reading. Instead of employing the metaphor of water flowing from a spring, we might consider the manifold appearances to project from their source. A single source of light illuminates and opens up a visible space, upon which a world projects forth. Figures emerge, taking shape, becoming recognizable, distinct. They interrupt the quiet reveries of spectators, awakening them first to notice the light and then to attend to their differentiated shapes. Caught up in and drawn towards the spectacle, the spectators only occasionally notice that it cannot fully satisfy. Struggles are resolved, only to awaken new struggles. The spectacle is, at the same time, not self-sufficient, it cannot account for itself. To witness appearances is at once to be drawn towards them and to be reminded of their insufficiency, and called back to their source. The authors in this volume have found in the contemplative metaphysics of Plotinus a rich resource for considering the way that cinematic images invite audiences to contemplate and reflect upon values that both transcend and inform them.

There are, now, many volumes devoted to the study of a single film or television series from a philosophical perspective. They often contain a range of essays showing how elements from a single film or series can be used to illustrate the ideas of this or that philosopher, or showing that puzzling elements of the film can be illuminated by relating them to philosophical doctrines. This, as far as I know, is the first volume dedicated to a single philosopher, that relates the ideas of that philosopher to a range of different films and draws out of the film theoretical implications of a body of work that was conceived many centuries before film was invented and yet manages to shed light on a range of film topics. It is a wide ranging and rewarding volume that offers insight both into cinema and into the challenging ideas of this influential and challenging thinker. There is, I believe, room for many more volumes such as this one.

Nathan Andersen

Notes on Contributors

Cameron Barrows

is an independent scholar interested in the relationship between Being, language, and subjectivity, as well as phenomenology, feminism, and Marxism. He has recently published an essay in *Biopolitics and Utopia: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (edited by Patricia Stapleton and Andrew Byers). He is also collaborating on a forthcoming book on the cinematic philosophy of Terrence Malick. His latest research is on the School of Salamanca and Marxism.

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

was born in Germany, did his undergraduate studies in Paris, and received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Oxford University in 1993. As a postdoctoral researcher based in Finland he undertook research on Russian formalism in Russia and the Baltic countries. He received a “habilitation” from the EHESS in Paris in 2000. He has been researching in Japan, and worked for the Center of Cognition of Hangzhou University (China) as well as at Tuskegee University in Alabama. He is now Associate Professor of philosophy at Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait. His books on film are: *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Sokurov, Bergman, Kubrik, Wong Kar-wai* (Lexington 2007) and *Organic Cinema: Film, Architecture, and the Work of Béla Tarr* (Berghahn 2016).

Michelle Phillips Buchberger

is Assistant Professor in Integrative Studies at Miami University and holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from Brunel University, England. She teaches both Integrative Studies and English at Miami, and her research areas include Post World War Two British Literature (specifically the work of John Fowles); Interdisciplinary Studies, and creativity. She is particularly interested in adaptations of Fowles’ work and in his collaborations with directors, including David Tringham.

Steve Choe

is an Associate Professor in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University. His areas of research and teaching include film theory, philosophy, and issues in film and media historiography.

Stephen R.L. Clark

is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Theology at the University of

Bristol. He continues to manage an international e-list for philosophers, and to serve as Associate Editor of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. His books include *The Moral Status of Animals* (1977), *The Nature of the Beast* (1982), *How to Think about the Earth* (1993), *Animals and their Moral Standing* (1997), *Biology and Christian Ethics* (2000), and *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor and Philosophical Practice* (2016). His chief current interests are in the philosophy of Plotinus, the understanding and treatment of non-human animals, philosophy of religion, and science fiction.

Vincenzo Lomuscio

(b. 1981), obtained his Ph.D. in "Philosophy and history of philosophy" from Aldo Moro University of Bari under Professor Costantino Esposito (*The Metaphysical Foundation in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*). At present he collaborates with the University of Bari and teaches philosophy in the Liceo De Sanctis of Trani. His interests are History of post-Kantian philosophy (especially questions of transcendentalism), the History of Contemporary Theology (Barth, Balthasar, Bonhoeffer, Rahner) and the role of analogy in Metaphysics.

Tony Partridge

(B.A. (Mod), H.Dip.Ed, M.Sc., Ph.D., M.A.) is a lecturer at the Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland, where he lectures in science, technology and the arts. He has a Ph.D. in Artificial Intelligence from the University of Warwick and more recently completed a Masters in philosophy at University College Dublin. He has published in the areas of ancient Greek philosophy, Russian philosophy, film, Artificial Intelligence, fine art and technology. Recent publications include "To What Extent Can Human Personality Become Encapsulated by Technology-related Activity" (2015), "After Image" (2015) about the paintings of Sinéad Aldridge, "The One and the Divine Light of Truth in Plotinus and Florensky" (2013) and "Art as Revelation: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky and the Insights of Víctor Erice" (2011) (with Maria Diaz-Caneja). His major research focus has been finding and describing the important cultural connections that link different disciplines, artists and thinkers.

Daniel Regnier

(Ph.D. EPHE Paris, M.A, LMU Munich, B.A. McGill) is Associate Professor of Philosophy at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, Canada. He works primarily on Plotinus, Neoplatonism in the Islamic World, Comparative Philosophy (Greece, China and India) and the Philosophy of Music.

Giannis Stamatellos

studied computer science and analysis (1991) in Athens, Greece. He received his Master of Arts (2001) and Ph.D. (2005) from the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. He was post-doctoral fellow in the Center for Neoplatonic Virtue Ethics (CNVE) at the University of Copenhagen (2010–2012) and research associate in the project Power Structuralism in Ancient Ontologies at the University of Oxford (2011–2014). He is the author of the books: *Plotinus and the Presocratics* (SUNY, 2007), *Computer Ethics: A Global Perspective* (Jones and Bartlett, 2007), *Introduction to Presocratics: A Thematic Approach to Early Greek Philosophy* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), as well as of various articles in philosophy and classics.

Enrico Terrone

received his B.A. in Electronic Engineering from the Politecnico di Torino, and his doctoral degree in Philosophy from the Università di Torino. He taught Film History and Criticism at the Università del Piemonte Orientale. He holds one National Scientific Qualification in Film Studies in Italy and one in France. He is member of Mind and Language Research group at the Jean Nicod Institute (Paris), and of LabOnt (Laboratory for Ontology) at the University of Turin. He is assistant editor of Brill Research Perspectives in Art and Law, *Rivista di estetica*, and *Segnocinema*. He published four books in Italian on science fiction cinema, screenplay, philosophy of film, and TV Series. He has been a fellow at the Käthe Hamburger Center “Law as Culture” in Bonn and at the Collège d’études mondiales—FMSH in Paris.

Sebastian F. Moro Tornese

was born in Buenos Aires, completed his Ph.D. at Royal Holloway, University of London with a thesis entitled “Philosophy of Music in the Neoplatonic Tradition: Theories of Music and Harmony in Proclus’ Commentaries on Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Republic*.” He has been interested in Pre-Socratic, Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical views since his undergraduate studies. He pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Oviedo, Spain and later he continued his research in the United Kingdom. His research focuses on the relationship between music and philosophy.

Panayiota Vassilopoulou

is Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, External Partnerships Research Lead for the School of the Arts at the University of Liverpool, and Director of the M.A. in Arts, Aesthetics, and Cultural Institutions. She holds a B.A. in

Economics (University of Athens), a Ph.D. in Philosophy (University of Liverpool) and has held two Post-doctoral research fellowships (Leverhulme Trust at the University of Liverpool, and Academy of Finland at the University of Helsinki). Her research publications are on art-theory and ancient philosophy with emphasis on creativity, metaphor and education. She has led many research projects (funded by the AHRC, EU-FP7, British Society of Aesthetics, Mind Association, British Academy) aiming at promoting the understanding of contemporary art by bridging the gap between the theoretical and practical expressions of creativity. She was the first UK Philosopher-in-Residence at an arts centre (Bluecoat 2013–15).

Introduction

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein and Giannis Stamatellos

Plotinus (204/5–270 CE) is the founder of Neoplatonism and one of the most influential philosophers in antiquity after Plato and Aristotle. While Plato's philosophy has frequently been used for the purpose of film,¹ Neoplatonism has provided relatively little input in film theory, film studies, or the philosophy of film. The allegory of the cave takes the moving image seriously in philosophical terms, and in the *Timaeus* (37d), Plato defines time as “a moving image of eternity.” However, the allegory of the cave, like so many of Plato's writings, is concerned with the difference between knowledge and belief, and Plato's preference for the conceptual and his dismissal of the image can cause problems for the film philosopher.²

Neoplatonic philosophy can attract film philosophers for different reasons. First there is the originality of Plotinus' understanding of time, which is described as the activity of the soul in the world. Plotinus defines time (*chronos*) as “the life of soul in the movement of passage from one mode of life to another” (*Ennead* III 7, 11, 43–45).³ This means that the soul unfolds in transitory life stages that are not marked by temporal intervals, which obviously is an interesting concept for film studies. In *Ennead* III 7 (*On Eternity and Time*) Plotinus conceives time beyond physical motion, perceptible qualities and corporeal change and offers two arguments to support this: (1) motion occurs in time, so time cannot be defined with something occurring in it (III 7, 8, 45–47); (2) motion can stop or be interrupted but time cannot (8, 6–8). Following Plato's definition of time as the “moving image of eternity,” Plotinus conceives eternity (*aiōn*) as the “paradigm,” the unchanging and perfect

1 Plato has been used for film by Baudry 1974–75, Baudry 1976, Gilabert 2003, Andersen 2014, Loughlin 2000, McGinn 2015. Enrico Terrone examines in the present volume Jean-Louis Baudry's older as well as Colin McGinn's recent claim that cinema is a Platonic sort of art since it allows us to perceive Forms.

2 In the *Allegory of the Cave*, prisoners are chained down watching images cast on the wall. In the *Philebus* (51b) Plato declares that painting comes after writing, and in the final book of the *Republic* he rejects the mimetic arts for being “twice removed from truth.” According to Socrates, mimesis “destroys reason” (605b–c; 606d).

3 All references to Plotinus's *Enneads* pertain to the A.H. Armstrong edition unless indicated otherwise.

life of the Forms at the level of the divine Intellect, while time is perceived as the “moving image” of eternal life, the restless and transitory life of the Soul around Intellect (III 7, 7, 1, 19).⁴

Of further interest is Plotinus’ search for the “intelligible” that can be grasped neither by mere sense perception nor by abstraction or analysis but through “contemplation” (*Ennead* III 8). Contemplation is a visual activity and much of Plotinus’ philosophy is about vision: the first effluence of the One (i.e. intelligible matter) is described as an “indefinite sight” in the first place; a “sight” which becomes “definitive” in Intellect (V 2, 1; V 3, 11). Even more, for Plotinus the perceptible universe is an illumination of the intelligible world of the Forms, that is, an animated image of the soul reflected upon the “mirror” of matter (III 6, 7–13; IV 3, 12; V 1, 9). The soul lies in-between the intelligibles and the perceptibles; it is as an “amphibian” being, living a double life between the higher world of Intellect and the lower realm of the senses. Perceptible beings are not original entities but “images drawn on the shadow” (VI 3, 8, 35–36); they are representations of the Forms that slip away on the “alien” mirror of matter (III 6, 14, 25). Plotinus conceives corporeal bodies as composite entities of matter and form (II 4, 2, 10–20), but he understands the bodies as projections of the soul. It is the body that is animated by the soul and not the soul that is fettered in the body (IV 3, 22–23; VI 7, 7).

Plotinus and Film Studies

On the one hand, it is not surprising that Neoplatonism has provided relatively little input in philosophical studies of film.⁵ At the first glance, a comparison between cinematic work and the philosophy of Plotinus seems improbable.

4 Eternity is “the life which exists around being, all together and full, completely without extension” (III 7, 3, 36–38); it is manifested in the atemporal and non-discursive life of the higher divine Nous, while time is expressed in the everlasting but transitory and discursive life of the cosmos (III 7, 11). Considering Plotinus’ dual-aspect nature of the *psyche*, the soul is described as living two lives: the one related to the lower perceptible realm and discursive thought (*dianoia*); and the second related to the higher intelligible realm of the Forms and non-discursive intelligence (*noesis*). Plotinus suggests that by contemplating eternity in ourselves we are able to recognize eternity through what is eternal to ourselves within time (III 7, 5, 1–12).

5 For existing studies see Jolivet 1933; Scharfstein 1943; Bréhier 1949; Mossé-Bastide 1959; Rutten 1960; Foubert 1973; Gandillac 1973; Aubenque 1976; Hancock 2002.

In Plotinus, the highest principle of all things, the One, is ineffable (v 3, 13–14; vi 8, 13), that is, the One cannot be expressed in thought or image. Any area that is expressive requires a duality of the subject and the received, reflected, or thought images.⁶ However, paradoxically, film *can* be useful here as it represents a unique and unusual medium for a rapprochement of our modern consciousness with the thought of this philosopher of late antiquity. Plotinus' understanding of the life of the soul in time can indeed be compared with the world of film. The higher intelligible part of the soul according to Plotinus remains at the level of the divine *Nous*. Soul's *nous*, the higher part of the soul, contemplates the higher intelligible realm of the Platonic Forms, while soul's lower part is directed to the perceptible realm (iv 8, 8).

Then there is a reason why the lack of Plotinus-inspired film studies should surprise us. The vestige of Neoplatonism laid by the decedents of Bergson *could* have had more decisive consequences for film studies. Bergson's "time-image" from *Matière et mémoire*, which has been recuperated by Deleuze for film studies, is supposed to be superior to "concepts" because the image is able to evoke thought content in a more fluent and less abstract fashion. We are not far away from Plotinus. For Plotinus the soul is a "movement even more than a thing" and Emile Bréhier wanted to see in the Plotinian soul a Bergsonian "élan vital" (Bréhier 1949: 49). Bréhier uses those same Bergsonian concepts to describe Plotinus' "vitalism" (52) able to create a "spiritual physics" as opposed to a "mechanist physics" (57). The soul is an intermediate and restless, constantly moving, entity situated between the intelligible and the perceptible world (iv 8, 7–8). The time-image (of both of Bergson and Deleuze) is thus clearly compatible with Plotinus' theory of time as a transitory intelligible movement of the soul in *Ennead* III 7, which announces a fluent way of seeing that is very interesting for cinema studies. A Plotinian moving image is a time-image, that is, an animated image springing from the soul as the result of contemplation of the intelligible world.⁷ In *Ennead* III 7 *chronos* has a psycho-ontological value

6 This is the case only in the realm of the Plotinian hypostases of being which lie below or outside the absolute unity with the One (v 1, 5; vi 8, 13).

7 The Plotinian soul only occasionally raises itself up to such a state through participation in the life of the Intellect whereby it re-enacts the continuous motion of which time is only a weaker reflection. Time as the life of the soul is the result of the soul's abandonment of pure contemplation (as the one expressed at the level of Intellect): to "have more" than already belonged to it in that unity, that is, to grasp in a self-willed manner what it already possesses as Intellect. This act is what leads to its *diastasis*, the stretching out of the life of eternity (which is *homou panta*) into the only being able to possess itself and things in successive aggregation. It is true that soul cannot be fully eternalized like Intellect, and as such its life as

which cannot be described in terms of properties or by using quantifying measures in spatial terms.

Plotinus psychological perception of time as inner and intelligible motion has a parallel in Bergson's conception of the *durée pure* and in the continuous flow of evolving consciousness that Bergson explained in his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889). For Bergson, the *durée pure* is the coincidence of currently experienced present and a remembered past in which every new moment carries with it the whole of its past in an all-embracing memory. Deleuze's concept of the "virtual" that Ansell-Pearson interprets as "eternal share of being" (Ansell-Pearson 2001), reflects Plotinus' theory of eternity; it is even more strikingly echoed in Deleuze's monumental work *Cinema*; and it also clearly reflects Deleuze's conception of the cinematic time-image as pure thinking beyond action, movement, and language codes (cf. Botz-Bornstein 2011).

There is still another Plotinian concept that is intriguing for film studies: the One as power-of-all-things beyond any kind of intelligence as it suggests the overcoming of both subjectivism and epistemological objectivism. This is reminiscent of Deleuze concept of cinematic experience as a means to perceive time and movement as a whole. In cinema, our mind does not need to put together the successive percepts or sensations but receives them as a whole. Of course, there are limits to those parallels, and Enrico Terrone points in his chapter in this book to the difference between the Plotinian One and Deleuzian time-based immanence: "The One, indeed, cannot be identified with time, since time shapes the world as a whole, whereas the One is beyond the world as a whole."

Thoughts on "totality" or "unity" in Western philosophy have been developed at different times and in different places by Meister Eckhart, Spinoza, Bruno, Hegel, and German Idealism, but also by Plotinus. Often those philosophies were interested in the tension between the individual and the general, and some attempted to channel this tension towards a harmonious kind of sublation. The *durée pure* is inscribed in precisely this current: in *durée pure*, past, present and future are supposed to form an organic whole. Such ideas of unity somehow contrast with postmodern concepts of deconstruction though the opposition is artificial to some extent. What both "organicists" and deconstructionists attack is the idea of a universality that is static; both believe that static universals are incompatible with individual, creative, and contemplative reason. When Steve Choe uses in the present volume Plotinus'

time has a positive meaning; however, the other aspect mentioned above is also an essential part of Plotinus' dual-aspect theory of the soul.

ideas as a critique of rationalization and the fact that “all things have become subject to its compulsion to rationalize and thus make intelligible all things according to a totalizing, instrumentalizing logic,” he shows that the ontological criticism based on “the One” is both classic and contemporary for the human mind. Similarly, Cameron Barrows links Plotinus’ philosophy in this volume to Martin Heidegger’s notion of the “Forgetfulness of Being,” which is supposed to suggest “that all has become meaningless in our postmodern world, that we can no longer ask ontologically valid questions about ourselves and the world through its abstraction.” And Michelle Buchberger describes how “the individual must escape the innumerable distractions of the material world” in order to “reconnect with higher planes of existence” or a “more holistic and authentic view of existence,” which Buchberger also sees as the artistic project of the writer John Fowles.

A certain idea of the “organic” enclosed to the Plotinian One remains of interest for all philosophical reflections on film, and this does not only concern time but also material. The philosophy of the One values a contemplative exploration of spatial and temporal experience through a rediscovery of the material. Several ideas can come to mind: Béla Tarr’s “emphasis on the concrete physicality of the event” (see Marchand 2009: 143) as well as Tarkovsky’s “belief that the camera is capable of unearthing the hidden significance of the material world” (Petric 1989–90: 29). In this book, Tarkovsky will be addressed several times, in particular by Tony Partridge and Daniel Regnier, who explain parallels on account of the Neoplatonic heritage in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy by which Tarkovsky was affected. Regnier finds a deep common philosophical insight according to which reality is fundamentally transparent and hence accessible to unmediated experience in Plotinus and Tarkovsky. Looking closer, the concept of the One is also contained in one of the most important philosophies of cinema ever produced: in “realism” as it has been formulated by André Bazin. According to Bazin, any contemplated reality gains in depth, which is “that depth of focus [that] brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic” (Bazin 2005 I: 35). Bazin does not mention Plotinus, but in his writings he repeatedly attempts to support his idea of reality as a contemplated unity through classical sources. Hugh Gray therefore defends Bazin in his introduction to *What is Cinema?* against all those who find Bazin’s classical spirit outdated and incompatible with modern theory:

Have they never heard of the philosopher Xenophanes who, gazing up at the heavens, proclaimed “the all is one”? Or of Parmenides who saw this whole as a continuum? Indeed if there had been cinema in those

days one could imagine a similar argument to the present one going on between the schools of Parmenides and Heraclitus. It was these philosophers who first saw the cosmos or “reality” as a whole.

GRAY 2005: 12

Other authors in this volume examine the overlaps of Neoplatonism and film theory in a variety of ways. Vincenzo Lomuscio explores the relationship between beauty and becoming as well as the relationship between essence and image. Each movement in the world is an image of eternal entities, eternal souls or ideas. Stephen Clark shows how Gnostics and Neoplatonists in late antiquity employed the fascination with shadows, reflections, and moving images. They were a reminder of how far we have already fallen, as we are seduced from heaven into a spatio-temporal and material world. Sebastian Moro Tornese proposes an understanding of cinema as a way of expressing the unity of the Platonic cosmos in terms of Plotinian contemplation. Cinema is not just a mirror of the external cosmos but also an *introversive* mirror of the soul and the intellect. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein finds that in Slow Cinema boredom cannot appear if we think in truly Plotinian terms because contemplation overcomes the distinction between the subject and the object. Giannis Stamatellos suggests a Plotinian approach when viewing Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* in the light of Plotinus’ dual-aspect theory of the soul, human freedom and self-determination. Finally, Panayiota Vassilopoulou offers a reconstruction of the Plotinian problematic and explores some pertinent characteristics of Bruce Nauman’s work. If the self is a moving image and the work of art is a metaphor of the self, does this motion ever stop or are they always a work in progress?

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“Cut Away Excess and Straighten the Crooked:” The Simplicity of Contemplative Cinema in the Light of Plotinus’ Philosophy

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

In an article written in 1998 and published in English in 2004, I was intrigued by Plotinus’ and Tarkovsky’s parallel approaches towards the aesthetics of images. Both the philosopher and the film director see the image as an organic link between idea and form, which leads them to the development of an aesthetics of the non-symbolic image. For Plotinus, the image represents the aesthetic and ontic link between the material world and the idea; it represents the link between the ideas residing in the higher intellect and forms, which are the sense expressions of the ideas.

Both Tarkovsky and Plotinus believe that images can be communicated without passing through the intermediary of the intellect. This does not mean that the act of seeing an image has become a matter of mere feeling. On the contrary, subjectivism is most consistently excluded from this aesthetics. Plotinus’ “grace” as an essence perceptible *in* the form (which remains nevertheless distinct from the exterior aesthetic form because “outside” we find only signs), overcomes both subjectivism and objectivism. The same is true for Tarkovsky’s (often metonymic) images expressing themselves all alone. The Plotinian idea of contemplation, that is, the fact of seeing the world “in a simple way” by avoiding all rationalist or scientific deformations, remains important for this way of seeing.¹

1 This does not mean that for Plotinus images can be communicated without passing through the intermediary of the soul’s intellect. Images are part and parcel of the integral functioning of intellect. However, images can be communicated without necessarily requiring the intermediary stage of discursive analysis for their perception (though ultimately discursive analysis remains a necessary intermediary for understanding of their meaning and import). There is in Plotinus a distinction between the higher Nous and the nous of the soul: the former is the second hypostasis of being, the latter is the higher faculty of the soul in close relation but not identical to the divine Intellect (I 1, 2). Plotinus also distinguishes between the discursive activity of the soul which moves from one concept to the other (see III 7, 11 and V 3, 6, 15) and he points to the non-discursive self-thinking activity of the higher intellect (*noesis*)

When I wrote the arguably first article on Plotinus and film studies, contemplation was not my central theme. Instead, I concentrated on the Plotinian grace as an unqualifiable quality that directly emanates as a sort of splendor from the One, and I sought this quality in Tarkovsky.² Almost twenty years later, “Contemplative Cinema,” which is also called “Slow Cinema,” has become a well-established movement, which makes a fresh interpretation of Plotinus’ philosophy of contemplation relevant in the context of film studies.

Contemplative Cinema is neither a genre nor a school, but “slow films” share certain family resemblances. Slow films distinguish themselves through long and fluid camera takes and infrequent editing as well as through a certain visual and narrative simplicity that can lead to a voluntary lack of mobility and expressiveness. The *mise-en-scène* in slow films is often austere, and lighting and color tend to be minimalistic. Slow films’ narrative’s simplicity often leads to indeterminate and unsound resolutions. Contemplative Cinema has only recently been discovered as a subject worthy of book-length studies by Ira Jaffe (2014) and Song Hwee Lim (2014), who have done valuable pioneering work on the topic. Jaffe’s book concentrates much on Cristi Mungiu’s *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, Gus van Sant’s *Elephant*, Lisandro Alonso’s *Liverpool*, and Pedro Costa’s *Ossos* as well as on two films by Béla Tarr. The top five on Lim’s list of contemporary Slow Cinema directors are Tsai Ming-liang, Béla Tarr, Alexander Sokurov, Lisandro Alonso, and Theo Angelopoulos (Lim 2014: 14).

(see VI 9, 5). The statement that Plotinus “avoids all rationalist or scientific deformations” does not imply that he advocates avoiding rationalist and scientific thought (*dianoia*). He rather shows how these are relativized in the ascent (usually through or by means of *dianoia*) to noetic thought. It is not impossible to attain *noesis* without subjecting the content of experience to scientific analysis, but discursive thought remains indelibly connected to *noesis* in humans as long as we are present in this world in a temporal and material state. Only in Intellect itself is this state revoked, something which can occur momentarily (gratuitously, by means of grace) when one has passed through the purificatory (temporal and material) stage of the practice of the virtues and philosophical discourse (otherwise known as dialectic). See Stamatellos 2007: 63 on this.

- 2 Two authors in the present volume, Daniel Regnier and Tony Partridge, continue this scrutiny of Tarkovsky’s work in Plotinian terms. Partridge argues that there is a path through the Russian Platonist tradition leading to Plotinus, and Regnier sees Tarkovsky’s way of creating a world through unmediated experience as Plotinian. It is illustrated by Tarkovsky’s claim that “my objective is to create my own world and these images which we create mean nothing more than the images which they are” (Gianvito 2006: 67).

1 Contemplation

To contemplate means “to look at” or “to gaze at” but also “to be aware of.” The association with slowness in Contemplative Cinema is no coincidence. The contemplative way of looking produces a surplus of understanding and this works better when the process is slow. To contemplate does not merely mean to collect information about what is seen. Information can be quantified and rationalized, and when it comes to the processing of information, speed is an advantage. For contemplation, on the other hand, slowness is a virtue. It makes sense to oppose contemplation to analysis, which illustrates another characteristic of the former. The slowness of Slow Cinema is not the slowness of slow motion, which remains an “exterior” slowness because the viewer will identify the latter as a sign that can be analyzed and understood. In Contemplative Cinema the slowness is interior and will be perceived as such by the viewer while analysis does not lead to awareness unless the results of the analysis are contemplated. Contemplation creates awareness, which means that it transforms the contemplator. When we say that in Slow Cinema the action develops slowly we mean that the process of watching such films is slowed down, too. In other words, the slowness seen by the viewer creates an interior slowness *in* the viewer. For cinema, this means that the interactive process of contemplation bestows to Contemplative Cinema a twofold meaning. Awareness arises when we stop and think.

What enters the discussion here is the relation between matter and spirit. Strictly speaking, the aim of Contemplative Cinema is to overcome the semiotics of signs and to look for an “interior beauty” in the same way in which Plotinus looked for an interior beauty. Plotinus thought that sensible qualities like harmony and colors should not be the focus of aesthetics. However, “interior” does not mean subjective. Saying that slowness is created “in” the viewer does not mean that the viewer empathizes the slowness and cultivates it as a subjective quality. This is impossible for the simple reason that slowness is not an object. Watching a contemplative film is not the same as watching or seeing an object. The specialist of Plotinus, Pierre Hadot writes that “the good is not a superior object situated above the other objects; it is not an object that one could think and of which one could speak” (Hadot 1968b: 199), and in his introduction to Plotinus’ Treatise 9, Hadot says that “the vision in question here is not a vision during which a subject perceives an object” (43). In this sense, discussions of boredom in Slow Cinema (cf. Lim 2004: 29; Misek 2010) are missing the point because boredom is always a feeling experienced by a subject with regard to an object. Plotinus insists on precisely this process when describing

how a spectator views an image: "In this turning he has the advantage that to begin with what he sees himself, while he is different from the god; then he hastens inward and has everything, and leaves perception behind in his fear of being different, and is one in that higher world; and if he wants to see by being different, he puts himself outside" (v 8, 11, 4).³ What Plotinus means is that the viewer might first still be conscious of his own existence and able to distinguish subject and object. However, once he has attained the contemplative state, he will leave this consciousness behind and put himself in a transcendent state of mind. Similarly, watching a contemplative film brings about the union of the object and the subject. Here, subjectivism is impossible for two reasons: first, as mentioned, because there is no object that the subject can empathize, and second, because the subject has modified its status and has become transcendent. It is strangely similar to how one of the pioneers of philosophy of film, Georges Duhamel, experienced cinema. Walter Benjamin quotes him in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: "I can no longer think what I want to think. The moving images took the place of my thoughts."⁴

2 The Contemplative Mind

It has been explained above that watching a slow film creates a "slow" inner experience in the viewer. At the same time, the fact that this slowness can be detected and even enjoyed by the viewer (while most people are probably getting bored when watching slow movies) means that the viewer *already had* a contemplative mind. Contemplative films can only be watched by spectators who are "able to contemplate," to use the words of Plotinus (III 8, 4, 69). The spectator must already have a certain attitude towards contemplation in the form of traces and shadows; then, suddenly, the slow and contemplative reality can appear in front of his eyes as authentic. Plotinus is even more radical: he holds that we should stop looking and close our eyes in order to enable the capacity of contemplation in us (I 6, 8, 24).

Something similar happens in Slow Cinema. In the long scenes of Contemplative Cinema, we do not have to concentrate on narrative elements, and our attention will not be captured by psychological states, social questions, or motivated actions. As a result, our attention will shift towards the objects or

³ I quote Plotinus throughout from Armstrong's translation.

⁴ *Scènes de la vie future*, Paris 1930, p. 52. Quoted in Benjamin 1935: 35.

towards some very simple actions. Plotinus would say that our soul is getting purified while before it was impure “and dragged in every direction towards the objects of sense, with a great deal of bodily stuff mixed into it consorting much with matter and receiving a form other than its own it has changed by a mixture which makes it worse” (I 6, 5, 43). While the world that we are watching has been reduced to a basic state of being, an aesthetic surplus can emerge. This is how Hadot describes the Plotinian aesthetic experience: “In front of our eyes can appear the world of Forms that is only the sensible world liberated from its material conditions. It is the word reduced to Beauty” (1994: 50). In everyday life we do not perceive this kind of reality because we are absorbed by vain preoccupations and our consciousness (or our “inner mirror”) is troubled by earthly and corporeal worries.

In the philosophy of cinema this pattern of an emerging aesthetic reality is contained in the kind of realism formulated by André Bazin. For Bazin, the reality seen through contemplation is a reality requiring “depth” because the “depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic” (Bazin 2005 I: 35).

3 Contemplation vs. Action

In Greek, contemplation is *theoria*, from which is derived not only the word theory, but also the word theater. There is thus an intrinsic link between theory in the sense of contemplation and the visual arts. *Theorein* means to consider, to speculate or to look at, and the *theoros* is the “spectator.” However, to contemplate does not mean to analyze in order to derive theories from those observations; the linguistic link with the more abstract theory is misleading. The contemplative look experiences concrete objects and comprehends them through consciousness. According to Bréhier, the contemplator “reasons, composes and grasps relationships” (Bréhier xvi). In general, this is a slow process because the viewer has to speculate about many possibilities. A Latin translation of *theoria* is therefore “speculation.” Contemplation is theoretical in the sense that it has no practical purpose. “I am only contemplating” is how the viewer insists on the detached character of contemplation and the freedom necessary for any act of contemplation. The world might press him to deliver quantified data and statistics but he wants to understand the essence of an object or a situation by speculating about its being. Contemplation takes place at a distance from busy life.

For Plotinus, all knowledge is derived from contemplation. Knowledge about the world (to know *that*) comes about through *theoreia* while practical knowledge provides only know-how. In this sense, contemplation is a sort of intellectual seeing though this does not mean that the contemplator is steeped in intellectual theories. It is intellectual inasmuch as the contemplator does not watch physical objects determined by a temporal and spatial context, but, according to both Plato and Plotinus, he contemplates “Forms,” that is, the realities underlying those individual appearances. The opposite of contemplation is therefore action, which concerns any kind of action including the action of analysis. Contrasting contemplation with analysis does not imply that the contemplative view attempts to mystify the world; on the contrary, contemplation is scientific and reasonable while analysis can have a mystifying effect. For Hadot, it is a mystification to “imagine that human life can be reduced to analyzable, mathematicisable, quantifiable or expressible components” (Hadot 1968b: 192).

It follows that the action movie is the contrary of the contemplative film. Plotinus makes the distinction between action and contemplation very clear when pointing out that the soul tends to abandon contemplation when it is in search of action: “Men, too, when their power of contemplation weakens, make action [which is] a shadow of contemplation and reasoning” (III 8, 4, 31). The reason is that their souls are weak and “they are not able to grasp the vision sufficiently.” Action cinema thinks that strong impressions will draw the viewer towards the picture or into the picture. However, the more intense the activity, the more conscious it becomes with the result that the power of contemplation weakens. Paradoxically, the intensity (no matter whether emotional or semiotic) widens the perceptive gap between the film and the spectator. Therefore, in Plotinian terms, in action movies, there will be no perception of interior beauty.

How can the perceptive gap be reduced? An important point in Contemplative Cinema is the reciprocity of film and viewer. Again this overlaps with Plotinus’ who writes that “different souls look at different things and are and become what they look at” (IV 3, 8, 15). When one’s activity “is directed towards the object of contemplation, (...) one becomes this, offering oneself to it as a kind of matter, being formed according to what one sees, and being oneself then only potentially” (IV 4, 2, 10). There is thus not only a metamorphosis of the glance but a metamorphosis of the entire being. The contemplative film transposes the spectator into a state of contemplation through which the contemplator becomes the object contemplated. Plotinus suggests that the human consciousness is a mirror reflecting the objects it is facing, which confirms the state of reciprocity.

4 Cinema Contemplates

However, the reciprocity goes still further in both Plotinus' aesthetics and Contemplative Cinema. In Contemplative Cinema, the film is supposed to be contemplative, too. Not only does the subject become like the object it is contemplating, but the object becomes like the subject. The meaning of "Contemplative Cinema" is to be taken literally: it is the film itself that contemplates because only like this can it evolve in a contemplative fashion and make the spectator contemplate. Plotinus evokes precisely this pattern when saying that "what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation which comes to be naturally, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature. And my act of contemplation makes what it contemplates, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate" (III 8, 4, 10).

The idea that "film contemplates" is reminiscent of Daniel Frampton's "film thinks" argument suggested in his book *Filmosophy*. Frampton claims that film does not simply show fictional daydreaming and imaginings, but that it is also able to carry out the function of thinking in the form of "planning, meditating, problem-solving, reverie, reasoning, daydreaming, figuring, judging, imagining" (93). We should add "contemplating" to Frampton's list of film thinking.

5 Simplicity

Contemplation sees the essence of objects but it does not grasp those essences by submitting its vision to theoretical complications. It is Plotinus' merit to have highlighted this aspect of contemplation. For Plotinus, contemplation is always "simple." Contemplation, as opposed to analysis, locates an organic web of temporal and spatial relations in the form of an immanent, self-sufficient logic. This self-sufficiency makes contemplation "simple" by definition. The logic of what is seen is not present in the form of empirical facts or abstract rules that need to be "thought about" and analyzed. Contemplation, like intuition, has left behind both perception in the conventional sense and reflection: "And the simple beauty of color comes about by shape and the mastery of the darkness in matter by the presence of light which is incorporeal and formative power and form. This is why fire itself is more beautiful than all other bodies, because it has the rank of form in relation to the other elements" (I 6, 3, 1).

The contemplating mind might also find something spiritual in the objects it contemplates; however, when this is the case, it is not because a spiritual quality has been extracted from the object by a subjective, analytical,

and calculating mind. Contemplation simply locates an immanent logic in the objects contemplated and such self-sufficient structures are spiritual by definition.

Also, Contemplative Cinema emphasizes simplicity. One of the most efficient tools of cinema to express simplicity is the long camera take. The long take is not only simpler than anything produced by editing and cutting, it is also by its nature closely related to contemplation. During the long take, the camera contemplates; and as a consequence, the viewer is contemplating, too. This alone is a good example of the Plotinian fusion of subject and object, which originates from the identification of being and thinking at the level of Intellect (v 1, 4). Plotinus identifies intellect with its Forms, its Being, and the Forms with their own individual intellects (v 9, 8, 3–7). A Form is both the object and the subject of Nous; and Intellect is the divine and purest intelligible being self-thinking its own contents, the Forms.

While cutting and editing produce an analytical and artificial time dependent on the human ratio, the long take presents the world in a simple fashion just “as it is.” By doing so, Slow Cinema’s long takes import an—often strange—simplicity into the world of space and time. However, this simplicity is not produced but merely seen. Contemplation works against analysis or thinking in general because any thinking would establish its own logic and not follow the logic of the world of Forms. Editing in cinema depends on a timely logic, which contemplation attempts to overcome. “Contemplation” is supposed to define a non-subjective way of seeing in which the object is not established by “complex” subjective editing. Therefore Hadot’s explanations of Plotinus’ aesthetics of simplicity overlap with those of Contemplative Cinema:

If the things precede the Good or the One, they will never be the result of a complex mechanism, invented by a reason eager to adapt means to an end, but they come into being effortlessly, without mediation and complication, through an absolutely simple activity which is nothing other than the contemplation of absolute simplicity. If the Good is the Good, then the things resulting from the Good cannot be different from what they are. They have their reason in themselves.

HADOT 1968A: 127–128

Another way of putting this is to say that the world as it is filmed by Contemplative Cinema is not edited but that it simply “poses itself.” This is also true for Plotinus’ world of Forms. The existence of this world is based on a self-sufficient logic that does not depend on an exterior point of view. According to Hadot, “this world invents itself all alone, it is like what [the biologist

Jakob von] Uexküll has said about living organisms: it is a melody singing itself" (1968b: 55). In cinema, the "melody singing itself" has its counterpart in the film producing its own contemplations while it is contemplating. Hadot provides another image evoking a parallel with Contemplative Cinema when saying that Plotinus' world of forms is like "a painter for whom it is enough to see his model, and then the image paints itself all alone on the canvas" (60). Bréhier goes even further when suggesting that contemplation is "the contemplation of what has no object," which leads to a "contemplation of contemplation" (Bréhier: x). In *Ennead* III 7, 11 Plotinus describes the generation of time in a narrative that is fashioned by time itself. Since higher beings are in eternal rest, the Muses, as Plotinus puts it, cannot tell us "how time first issued forth" and so

one might perhaps (even if the Muses did exist then after all) ask time when it has come into being to tell us how it did come into being and appear. It might say something like this about itself; that before, when it had not yet, in fact, produced this "before" or felt the need of the "after," it was at rest with eternity in real being; it was not yet time, but itself, too, kept quiet in that. But since there was a restlessly active nature which wanted to control itself and be on its own, and chose to seek for more than its present state, this moved, and time moved with it; and so, always moving on to the "next" and the "after," and what is not the same, but one thing after another, we made a long stretch of our journey and constructed time as an image of eternity. (III 7, 11, 1–20).

We are again strongly reminded of Frampton's concept of "film thinking itself" as well as of the Mindscreen phenomenon that occupied film scholars in the late 1970s. "Film is a dream—but whose?" asked Bruce Kawin in *Mindscreen: Bergman and First-Person Film* (1978), concluding that the film "speaks itself" (Kawin: 1, 114). While cutting and editing produce an artificial time dependent on the human ratio, slow cinema's long takes serve, just like an organic structure, as natural mechanisms able to *produce* time. All this is in agreement with Hadot's considerations of "a painting painting itself."

The description of time as a "divine" storyteller signifies for Plotinus the eternality of time; *chronos* is as an everlasting by-product of a restless soul in intelligible motion prior to spatiality and physical motion. This also explains how time is the image of eternity in Plato's *Timaeus*. Correspondingly, it has been found that Béla Tarr's extremely long takes "tell as time itself would tell—as a time indifferent to the human experience of time" (Lee 2014). The time is told by time and the film speaks itself. This is also an illustration of Deleuze's time-image in which time itself becomes an object of representation. From

a director's point of view, to think about what needs to be painted or filmed would *prevent* the reality (or the Forms) from entering the canvas/screen. Instead, as paradoxical as it might sound, the scene needs to film itself. The reality that art attempts to establish "is not the result of following our train of logical consequences and purposive thought: it is before consequential and purposive thinking; for all this comes later, reasoning and demonstration and the confidence [produced by them]" (v 8, 7, 45). Plotinus' statement, if brought in relationship with the above thoughts on aesthetic auto-production, suggests that the melody or the contemplative film should not be the result of editing (or some other sort of reasoning taking place within the framework of a pre-established logic), but that the artist should simply watch how it produces itself through contemplation. Plotinus distinguishes between discursive thinking (*dianoia*) moving from one concept to another (v 3, 6; related to Soul) and non-discursive contemplative self-thinking (*noesis*) (vi 9, 5). Editing is then what Plotinus refers to as discursive thinking which, according to Jean Brun, "successively grasps the things and scans [parcourt] them one after another. But with regard to what is absolutely simple because it is simply absolute, there is nothing to scan: an intellectual contact is enough" (Brun 1988: 45).

6 Films and Dreams

The above-described dynamic of a contemplative aesthetics circumventing discursive thought as well as editing, works to a considerable extent in parallel with what happens when we are dreaming, and an important link between Plotinus and film studies can be based on this finding. First of all, dreaming is not the same as remembering or telling a dream. When we are narrating our dreams, we are necessarily editing them by using elements of temporal, spatial, or causal logic; and we can do this only *afterwards* and not *while* we are dreaming. The proximity of Plotinus' thoughts with this paradigm, which has some importance in film theory, is flagrant. Plotinus writes that "it is enough if the intellect comes into contact with it; but when it has done so, while the contact lasts, it is absolutely impossible, nor has it time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to reason about it" (v 3, 17, 28). What happens during contemplation is thus similar to dreaming. Jérôme Laurent writes that Plotinus' way of approaching objects comes close to the experience of sleep. Only in the dream *narrative* is an "outside" reason imported from the waking world, which will subsequently distort the dream instead of clarifying it. However, "when sleeping, we become a pure vegetative soul shot through with shadows of reason. Our body liberates itself from the rigor of shapes. We are dreaming

and once we wake up, the delirium experienced will be a memory of the closeness of matter" (Laurent 1992: 78). "Retrospective reasoning" works very much like Freud's gluing thoughts (*Kittgedanken*) that are used in dream narratives and by means of which parts of the dream will be glued together *retrospectively* (see Freud 1945: 132ff) by discursive thinking. Retrospective reasoning divides time into past, present, and future and establishes a "because" and a "therefore." It will describe the dream experience in a way that "makes sense." The problem is that such a reproduction of the dream will never grasp the dream itself. In parallel, in films, dreams can be constructed through a Freudian dreamwork because, according to Dudley Andrew, "fades, dissolves, and other narrative punctuation graphically indicate that the images are of human construction, [they are] meant not to stand for reality but to criticize it or to respond to it" (Andrew 1976: 91). The same problem is at the core of Plotinus' aesthetic experience. Both films and dreams are closer to Plotinus' contemplative—non-discursive form of thinking. Contemplative films and dreams are self-thinking thoughts prior to consciousness as they have not been submitted to editing. Would the divine experience be about dreams, Plotinus would look for the dream *experience* and not for the Freudian dream *narrative*. In the dream *experience*, all reasoning has been abandoned and man is really himself because he is thinking nothing at all: "yes, if he is [merely] himself he is empty of everything, when he is thinking nothing at all" (IV 4, 2, 12). Here, experience exists not as a Freudian, materialized, concept, but as something ungraspable because it produces itself. Time is not experienced as a rationalized narrative because for the spiritual being able to contemplate there is no time.⁵ We can conclude that the Freudian and the Plotinian notions of dream are different because for Plotinus the unconscious part lies at the higher level of the soul because it is the intelligible part that is identified with the World Soul and therefore Intellect (see IV 8, 8), while the Freudian unconscious resides in the "lower" part.

The idea of the dream as an action implying no "real" action has fascinated philosophers from Hamann to Bergson.⁶ However, the problem has also been

5 Freud was very much aware of the difference between the dream and the dream narrative. The "forgetfulness" about time and its illogical distortion like confusion of years, time of the day, etc. was for him one of the main characteristics of dreams.

6 Hamann writes in his *Schriften*: "To me the opinion of certain philosophers who ascribe to the human soul a higher degree to when sleeping, seems to be significant. They believe that the ability to unveil the future is strongest when the soul is not occupied with processing movements and actions of the body" (Hamann 1922: 371). Similarly, Bergson points to the special state of "indifference" of the dreamer by writing: "To be awake signifies to want. Stop wanting, detach yourself from life: like this you pass from the I of waking life to the I of

detected in film studies. Rudolf Arnheim asked in his *Visual Thinking* whether “logical links of reasoning can be represented in images” (Arnheim 1969: 241). Within a Freudian framework, Arnheim established “parallels between dream images and those created in art on the one hand, and the mental images serving as the vehicle of thought on the other” (ibid.). Arnheim’s analysis is restricted to images, which means that one important component of his “visual thinking” as it appears in film is not considered: the component of time. The time problem will become important in post-formalist discussions to which Tarkovsky has made interesting contributions. While for Russian Formalists time existed only through the relationships between different shots, Tarkovsky held that the shots themselves should have an “inner” time and that the artistic expression “has to come from inner necessity [and] from an organic process going on in the material as a whole” (Tarkovsky 1986: 120). The organic whole of the material from which this necessity arises, and which Tarkovsky puts forward in his argument, is not the abstract, structural, organism of a film that has been produced by montage and editing. Like for Plotinus’ Intellect (the One beyond life and structure), it is an organic whole formed by an “inner necessity” (Tarkovsky: 121) that arises out of the “inner dynamic of the mood of the situation” (74).

7 The Long Camera Take

It is necessary to come back to the importance of the long camera take in Contemplative Cinema. For Plotinus, the true function of art is “heuristic,” which means that we discover through art an eternal model or an idea. How does this work for Contemplative Cinema? In Alonso Lisandro’s *Liverpool* (2008) we see Farrell stuffing various items into his bag before leaving the ship in search of his daughter. The scene lasts not less than two minutes. Were the scene only a sign announcing a certain action, a few seconds of playing time would have been enough. The remaining minutes could have been used for providing more information about Farrell’s situation. However, the scene works in the service of simplicity, not of efficiency. The scene is purified of all excess information as if the director were following Plotinus’ recommendation to “cut away excess and straighten the crooked” and to “clear the dark and make it bright”

dreams, the latter being less tense but more expanded [moins tendu mais plus étendu] than the former” (Bergson 1922: 136). Also Bergson insists that the dreamer’s reasoning is not “illogical” but that it follows its “own logic,” that the dreamer simply “raisonne trop.” See on this topic Botz-Bornstein 2007: 6).

(16, 9, 7). Other scenes of Contemplative Cinema could be evoked, for example Bela Tarr's eleven minute shot of cows on a muddy meadow as the opening scene of *Satantango*. How is the dark cleared and made bright in those scenes? First, it happens through purification. However, purification does not simply signify a shift towards minimalism. The contemplative way of showing the world in a purified state is supposed to lead the viewer towards a similar state of purification and this cannot be achieved through mere minimalism. The experience should not be minimal but maximal: the refinement, purity, and subtlety of sensations should be preserved. Minimalism will never lead to a deepening of sensation but it will simply lead to abstraction. The reason is that minimalism follows a logic (the logic of minimalism) while contemplative cinema merely contemplates the intelligible. This is how contemplation "goes towards a reality where, instead of losing the richness of sensation, it transcends reality and discovers its depth" (Bréhier: xvii). The viewer is invited to separate himself from himself and to lose himself in the contemplation that is presented to him on the screen. The cinema is a typical place where this can happen. In general, it is wrong to confine film aesthetics to artistic and stylistic impressions of reality. The phenomenon of film is to a very large extent based on attempts to make the spectator lose his/her grip on the commonsensical distinction between dreams and reality. In other words, the viewer must separate himself from the knowledge that he had acquired beforehand through perception and discursive reason. Plotinus believes that contemplative simplicity leads the soul to a state of purity, and Contemplative Cinema aspires a similar presence or perfect simplicity by attempting to grasp images and not propositions. The aim of this simplification is to exclude (or to bracket) our conscious thoughts because our consciousness is merely a sensation creating a distance between the spectator and what is seen. Our consciousness provides only reflections and shadows while contemplation achieves a total presence. This Plotinian thought has a clear parallel in cinema: the long camera take is supposed to grasp this presence. The world of Forms represents a pure fact that can only be contemplated. In other words, Contemplative Cinema as well as Plotinus' philosophy are supposed to create an ecstasy in which seer and the seen become one. This does not happen through empathy but through the sort of looking that transcends both the subjective and the objective components of aesthetic experience.

8 Metonymies

The long camera take is the most distinctive device of Contemplative Cinema. However, it is not enough to measure the length of the shot in order to establish

whether it is contemplative or not. What matters is *what* is filmed and *how* it is filmed. A recurring device is the obstinate focus on a certain scene or a certain object or the showing of the detail apparently for the detail's sake. It is possible to summarize these kind of shots under the predicate "metonymical" in the broadest sense of the term. The metonymy is a figure of speech that, like the metaphor, works with substitutions: an item is not called by its own name but by the name of another. However, whereas in metaphor the substitution is based on a specific analogy between the signifier and the signified, in metonymy the substitution is based on contiguity, that is, on elements that are *not necessarily* similar, but are in contact or in proximity.

Contemplative Cinema has the tendency to show certain actions in a detailed fashion without any apparent reason. Steve Choe mentions in the contribution to this volume Epstein's idea of "the close-up, the keystone of cinema" (Abel 1993: 236) able to guide "the viewer's attention to the visual detail typically overlooked in everyday life. When an object or, especially, a face fills the screen, the background falls away, bestowing things with a living expressivity, the possibility of change in time, which is inseparable from the ontology of the moving image" (Choe, "The One in *Photogénie*"). Also in a Plotinian perspective the moving image and the time-image coincide, as has been mentioned in the introduction to this book. Since time is the result of the soul's restless intelligible motions, and since the physical realm reflects time's everlasting motion, the moving images reflected on the mirror of matter are no more than psycho-temporal moving images projected in the senses.

In contemplative films, time is not flowing but details are lengthily presented in order to be contemplated. This procedure is metonymical as it makes us contemplate proximate meanings. Wong Kar-wai's films have this quality in general (see Botz-Bornstein 2016) and also Tarkovsky has a strongly metonymical tendency with his frequent close-ups and *pars pro toto* (of objects) that are neither signs nor symbols but "simply" attempt to represent some sort of reality. The proximate meaning evoked by the metonymy is not evident for analysis. A clear relationship between signifier and signified cannot be established, but the meaning is more likely to be found by means of contemplation. Contemplation always takes time, which is why the metonymical shot usually has a lingering and hesitating quality. The lingering quality also bestows a sense of intimacy to metonymies, which again differentiates them from metaphors and symbols. Contrary to symbols or signs, metonymies oppose the sphere of the official. The metonymical approach attempts to overcome symbolism since the metonymy represents an alternative to the symbol. The metonymic gesture is anti-symbolic because it circumvents the semiotic art of signs dependent on the relationship *between* images by concentrating on the images themselves. In Plotinian terms, we can say that they attempt to concentrate on the "inner"

meaning of the object or of the scene. This inner meaning can only be filmed in a simple way by holding the camera on the object or on the scene for a long time. It is similar to Plotinus' approach of perceiving time from the angle of eternity as is laid out in *Ennead* III 7, 5.

Cinematic metonymies are "anti-temporal" in the sense of being hostile to the linear movement of time. While metaphors need to be integrated in the overall flow of the narrative in order to be understood, metonymies make the viewer stand and contemplate. Metonymies are detached from the narrative flow. This is why literary scholars generally agree that metonymies provide profundity. While metaphors exist within an overall time frame determined by a totality, metonymies appear as compressed bits of information able to contain their own time. In a metonymical presentation, things are what they are and nothing else. In an anti-Aristotelian way, metonymies find the reason for their own being in the One. They arise effortlessly, without mediation or complication from a creative activity that is utterly simple: this is the art of contemplation. The principle does not only apply to objects but also to characters and places. Also, characters can have a metonymical function. It has been found that some of Wong's characters "are simply there, without reason, whether 'there' is an unidentifiable desert or contemporary urban Hong Kong. Characterization seems motivated by futile passions, lives constantly trying to escape from themselves, acts fated to be incomplete" (Odham and Hoover 1999: 187). Apart from objects and persons, places can be metonymical, too. Tarkovsky's "zone" in *Stalker* is an example because it claims in a tautological way to be absolutely self-sufficient: to be just what it is.

9 Hieroglyphs

The fascination with metonymies is paralleled by Neoplatonism's fascination with hieroglyphs. The hieroglyph (Greek for "sacred writing") is similar to the metonymy as it represents another example of an expression of non-discursive thought. Hieroglyphs have attracted the attention of Neoplatonists especially during the Renaissance because of the direct and non-discursive way in which information could be transmitted by those pictograms. The information was often believed to be of divine character. For the Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the hieroglyph embodied ancient wisdom: "When the Egyptian priest wished to signify divine mysteries, they did not use the small characters of the script, but the whole images of plants, trees or animals; for God has knowledge of this not by the way of multiple thoughts but like the pure and firm shape of the thing itself" (Ficino, *Opera* Vol. 2 1768; quoted in Gombrich

1978: 159). In his annotation of *Ennead* IV 8, Ficino supports Plotinus' conjecture that hieroglyphs are the pictures of Platonic notions (see Mansueto and Calogero 2007: 159). In *Ennead* IV 8, 6, Plotinus explains that Egyptian hieroglyphs testify to the fact that ideas were realities and substances: hieroglyphs manifest "the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge."

Similar to the metonymy, hieroglyphic images do not symbolize but suggest wisdom and knowledge "all together in one" without discourse or deliberation. Correspondingly, Daniel Regnier offers in the present volume an analysis of Plotinus' non-discursive reasoning. For Plotinus, analysis cannot detect the "why" of hieroglyphs because they exist "before research and before reasoning:" "what has come into existence is so beautifully disposed, if anyone knows how to admire it he expresses his admiration of how this wisdom, which does not itself possess the reasons why substance is as it is" (IV 8, 6, 16). Hadot explains that the Plotinian Forms are precisely those hieroglyphs that "are drawing themselves all alone" (1994: 57) because they do not *receive* a meaning but "in just one time" (d'un seul coup) they auto-provide their meaning. This is also what Forms are supposed to be for Plotinus: elements of substantial wisdom emerging all alone without reflection or discourse in non-discursiveness. Forms do not exist as propositions, axioms or expressions for then they "would only say something about other things and would not be the things themselves" (V 5, 1, 32–39). Contemplative thinking is able to unify the Many in the One or plurality in unity, and hieroglyphs are related to this unification of image and meaning. All that is needed for the recognition of those Forms is contemplation.

Hieroglyphs also have an important place in film theory. Regnier, in his contribution to the present book, finds the hieroglyph concept reinstated in Tarkovsky's philosophy of film. Poststructuralist film scholar Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier has argued that in film, "hieroglyphs are 'figurative enigmas'" that can appear as dreams and rebuses (Ropars-Wuilleumier 1982: 32–33). Already, Eisenstein attempted to see the camera shot as a multivocal hieroglyph because the combination of different pictographs reminded him of the process of filmic montage. In his early essay "Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram]" (1929), Eisenstein explains the similarities he observes between the use of (Japanese) pictographs and montage in cinema: "The method, reduced to a stock combination of images, carves out a dry definition of the concept from the collision between them. The same method, expanded into a wealth of recognized semantic combinations, becomes a profusion of *figurative* effect. The formula, the concept, is embellished and developed on the basis of the material, it is transformed into an image, which is the form"

(Eisenstein 1988: 141). Of course, cinema becomes here purely conceptual and abstract: ideographical compounds, held together by abstract relationships tend to shift towards the abstract. Eisenstein's hieroglyphs are merely signs. It is in this sense that Benjamin points to Eisenstein's French contemporary, the director Abel Gance, who liked to compare films with hieroglyphics and who wrote: "[Film] has then brought us, in the wake of a most remarkable turn to the past, back to the level of expression of the Egyptians. (...) Pictography has not yet reached full maturity for the reason that our eyes are not yet up to it. There is not yet enough respect, not enough cult for what seeks expression through it" (Gance 1927 quoted in Benjamin 2003: 22/Engl.: 220).

While this was said in 1927, two decades later, Siegfried Kracauer would provide a less abstract definition of filmic hieroglyphs when formulating his social and psychological theory of filmic images. Kracauer finds that certain formal and behavioral patterns are best characterized as "visible hieroglyphs" of the "unseen dynamics of human relations" (Kracauer 1947: 7). Equally in the 1940s, Alexandre Astruc's idea of the "camera-stylo" (camera-pen) establishes the expressions of cinema as an activity of writing that—paradoxically—circumvents the concept of the sign. Astruc also integrates abstraction into cinema, but the abstract element is no longer seen (like montage) as an underlying structure. On the contrary, the abstract language expresses itself directly, which is how Astruc avoids semiotic approaches that attempt to see film as a sign language: "By language I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is what I would like to call this new age of cinema, the age of *caméra-stylo*" (Astruc 1968: 18). Astruc's strategy intends to grasp "any kind of reality" directly and *not* through signs. He sees film as the production of an aesthetic *écriture* based on subjectivism as much as on objectivism. The *caméra-stylo* approach implies a complex dialectical exchange of objective and subjective positions. In a film "recorded" by a *caméra-stylo* there is neither the evocation of subjective, intimate symbols nor is there an objectively "recorded" reality. The *caméra-stylo* works rather like a pen when it is drawing a hieroglyph: by recording it and producing reality, it transforms reality into an abstraction. Through this interplay of realization and abstraction the filmic image can arise as an "*écriture*." Finally, the realistic attitude of the *caméra-stylo* reduces the semiotic, signifying character of reality and functions like a "negative symbolism" in which reality becomes significant through its non-signification.

Similar to Astruc, Amédée Ayfre, a French priest of the Society of Saint Sulpice and a defender of realist cinema, held that *écriture* should transgress the division of film into form and contents because it designates "neither a content

nor a style" (Ayfre 1969: 162). Here, the hieroglyphic *écriture* is an abstraction (or a stylization) supposed to produce a concrete reality. Ayfre believed film to be an instrument of Christian revelation. In his writing on a "theology of the image" he describes *écriture* as "neither a content nor a style" (162) because it transcends the division of film into form and content. Phenomenological existence transgresses constructive devices as well as stylization, and Ayfre's sympathies clearly go towards Neo-Realist cinema. As a Jesuit priest, Ayfre strove to reconcile his existentially-minded phenomenology with his Catholicism, and his suggestions do sometimes sound rather Plotinian. Ayfre's phenomenological realism attempts to grasp a "spiritual" reality that represents the internal logic of a universe created by the director. This reality is more than the subconscious emanation of a director. Ayfre alludes to a reality that is—like Plotinus' Good—not an object that can be thought and analyzed, but a pure presence by which we are invaded. Of course, this is only possible through contemplation because it "suppresses and eliminates from reality every defined object." In the end, contemplating means, if we remember Bréhier's words, "to leave behind the limited and the measured" (Bréhier 1968: ix–x). The One has an infinite power of creation.

Conclusion

It has been shown that contemplation in Contemplative Cinema is supposed to replace perception and that this is in agreement with Plotinus' philosophy. Plotinus thought that contemplation permits us to enter the intelligible; the realism that Contemplative Cinema attempts to achieve has a similar objective. Contemplative Cinema communicates images without passing through the intermediary of the intellect. At the same time, it is not subjective as there is no abundance of emotion in the contemplative approach. Contemplative Cinema sees the world "in a simple way" by avoiding rationalist deformations.

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The One in *Photogénie*: Plotinus and Jean Epstein

Steve Choe

One of the most mysterious concepts in film theory is that of *photogénie*, first made relevant to the cinema by Louis Delluc but more fully elaborated by French filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein (1897–1953). Perhaps its most well-known articulation is found in Epstein's essay first published in 1924, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*":

What is "photogénie"? I would describe as photogenic any aspect of things, beings, or souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction. And any aspect not enhanced by filmic reproduction is not photogenic, plays no part in the art of cinema.

KELLER and PAUL 2012: 293

As Epstein suggests in this passage, *photogénie* is inseparable from the art and technology of the cinematic moving image. It names that ineffable moment, regardless of whether the film is constructed narratively or not, when what is depicted, whether animate or inanimate, seems to acquire a heightened ontological status. Yet precisely because of this special ontological status, which seems to suspend conventional metaphysics and frustrate analytical explanation, *photogénie* remains theoretically elusive. It names that unnamable spark of contingency captured on film that confounds not only genre, but also theoretical elaboration based on empirical observation. As film scholar Mary Anne Doane writes, *photogénie* "is usually considered to be theoretically incoherent. No doubt this is due to the fact that *photogénie* is designed to account for that which is inarticulable, that which exceeds language and hence points to the very essence of cinematic specificity" (Doane 2003: 89).

By naming that which cannot be named, that which "exceeds language," *photogénie* opens itself to comparison to an entire series of "theoretically incoherent" concepts in the history of philosophy. Moreover, Epstein's conceptless concept inspires age-old debates that underpin the most important questions within film theory, such as that between movement and stasis, the phenomenology of perception, and the question of whether our analytical language is even appropriate for describing, let alone thinking, these philosophical

problems. One of these questions asks about fundamental issues that resonate with what Plotinus calls “the One”: an infinitely capacious, generative principle that eludes the distinction between the material and immaterial (or the Soul and Intellect). The One stands at the center of Plotinus’s philosophy, providing the non-ontological, primordial starting point that makes possible all things and all beings. It is the first cause preceding the concept of “firstness” itself:

For there must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really one, and not a different being and then one; it is false even to say of it that it is one, and there is “no concept or knowledge” of it; it is indeed also said to be “beyond being.” (V 4, 1)

The One constitutes all things material and immaterial and yet is ontologically distinct from them. Indeed, despite the multiplicity of possible beings in the world, they remain mere reflections produced by the endless activity of the One. Illustrating this, Plotinus writes, “For there is a kind of center, and around this a circle shining out from it, and beyond these another light from light” (IV 3, 17). As such, the One comprises a fundamentally undecidable position between being and non-being, such that its concept remains beyond intelligible reach. For this reason, many commentators have called the philosophy of Plotinus “mystical” in that it stipulates reunion with a profoundly inexplicable, transcendent absolute.

In many ways like *photogénie*, the One remains theoretically incoherent and constitutes an essence beyond being. In this chapter, I would like to draw a number of comparisons between Epstein’s *photogénie* and Plotinus’s formulation of the One by emphasizing some key conceptual similarities and underscoring textual coincidences in the way they have been formulated. As we shall see, the concept of *photogénie* may be read to inspire philosophical reflection, while the ineffability of the One may be understood to think essences beyond the epistemological impasses rooted in cinematic representation. By focusing on the production of being from non-being at the level of the Intellect, I hope to shed light on some difficult, “incoherent” aspects of the thinking of both Plotinus and Epstein. My eventual aim, however, is to show that the conditions under which the thinking subject apprehends the One may be understood as analogous to the conditions under which the spectating subject experiences *photogénie* in the cinema. To put it another way, I will argue that *photogénie*

encourages a specific comportment toward the world that may be compared to the comportment required for appropriately apprehending the undifferentiated unity that is the One.

1 Toward the Indefinable

Of the three basic hypotheses of Plotinus's philosophy, the One stands above and beyond the other two: namely, the Intellect (*nous*) and the Soul. The One is the first cause of all things, before ontology and experience, from which all entities such as life, time, and reality are, as Dominic J. O'Meara puts it, "derived" (O'Meara 1993: 60–69). The ultimate cosmological *a priori*, the One comprises the very potentiality of all beings. It makes possible the impossible, bringing all things into being. "What then," Plotinus asks, "are 'all things'? All things of which that One is the principle. But how is that One the principle of all things? Is it because as principle it keeps them in being, making each one of them exist? Yes, and because it brought them into existence. But how did it do so? By possessing them beforehand" (v 3, 15). From the limitlessness of the One emanates the principle of the Intellect, which comprises being and its very intelligibility by a thinking being who can ask about beings. The Intellect is closely associated with the Platonic realm of immaterial and ideal Forms. And from the activity of the Intellect is derived the Soul, which exists at the border between the sensible and intelligible realms. The Soul animates the body to desire material objects that are ulterior to it. The hierarchical relationship between the One and the Intellect may be thought as analogous to the relationship between the Intellect and the Soul. Plotinus writes, in a formulation preceding the first passage quoted above, that "if there is anything after the First, it must necessarily come from the First," and subsequently, "there must be an order of seconds and thirds, the second going back to the first and the third to the second" (v 4, 1). However as original cause of all things, Plotinus notes that the One remains the universal object of desire, toward which being aims to return. While the One is omnipresent in all the beings that are ultimately produced by it, it is not identical with these beings. Throughout the *Enneads*, Plotinus maintains this tension between difference and identity that ultimately underpins the One. The One remains profoundly different and indifferent to intelligible beings, existing only in itself and for itself. And yet, it is neither the same nor like itself. Thus when Plotinus calls the One a "unity," he notes that it is not the unity of a multiplicity or the first in a series of ascending quantities, for such formulations induce complex dualities that defeat its basic, irreducible simplicity (vi 9, 6).

Plotinus thus makes clear that the One cannot be described utilizing our everyday metaphysical language. Representations of the One through predetermined concepts and stable signifiers remain mere replicas, ossified afterimages of its elusive activity. Discursive thinking can only impose misconceptions of its basic non-being since discourse always implies a “something” that is namable and subsequently knowable. Plotinus writes:

It is, therefore, truly ineffable: for whatever you say about it, you will always be speaking of a “something.” But “beyond all things and beyond the supreme majesty of Intellect” is the only one of all the ways of speaking of it which is true; it is not its name, but says that it is not one of all things and “has no name,” because we can say nothing of it: we only try, as far as possible, to make signs to ourselves about it. (v 3, 13)

Philosophical writing attempts to do justice to the One by schematizing and reconstructing it through language, but such attempts will always already misrepresent its fundamental heterogeneity. As a consequence, Plotinus notes that the One can only be signified negatively: “But if we do not have it in knowledge, do we not have it at all? But we have it in such a way that we speak about it, but do not speak it. For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it” (v 3, 14). The One evades all ontological claims upon it, such that its description can only be given by describing what the One is not. This passage is significant also in noting the significance of the temporality of this negation, for the negative claim upon the One affirms the belatedness of the concept of “the One.” Any attempt to speak of the One, including Plotinus’s own, “comes after it.” Human discourse always arrives too late, after the transitoriness of the One has already sunk into the past. All attempts to think and represent Plotinus’s supreme principle remain missed opportunities, unavoidable and irreconcilable.

How and why this comes to be may be gleaned in the way the Neoplatonic thinker explains how the Intellect and being emanate from the One. Plotinus describes the One as having a kind of “superabundance” that flows out and constitutes “something other than itself.” The production of this “something other” paves the way toward a kind of self-reflection that allows for the consolidation of the very concept of the One, a concept that “comes after” the act of grace that creates it. Plotinus puts it this way:

How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the

One is not being, but the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and being. (v 2, 1)

From the nothingness of the One emanates the something of being and its meaning as made manifest through the Intellect. Yet through the derivation of the Intellect from the first principle, the Intellect aspires to return to the One, to that divine causality that animates the life of the Intellect itself. The ontology of being can only be thought after Plotinus's primal principle generates it, as a productive consequence to the creative activity of the One. This is why all attempts to theorize or phenomenologically describe the One remain *ex post facto* formulations. They occur as a result of what Plotinus describes as "halting" and "turning toward" the One, after being has emerged and gazes back toward the fundamental principle that has produced it. Significantly, the philosopher notes that this turning is aligned with seeing and, by co-extension, with the act of contemplation. "But Intellect is not that Good," he writes, here referring to the One as the Good, "How then does it generate Intellect? Because by its return to it it sees: and this seeing is Intellect" (v 1, 7). The Intellect attempts to make sense of the One, to illuminate it and thus to see it. To see that the act of seeing itself is made possible by the grace of the One and that this act is inextricably linked to the Intellect, is to understand that seeing and understanding are one:

Therefore what is called number in the intelligible world and the dyad are rational principles and Intellect; but the dyad is indefinite when one forms an idea of it by what may be called the substrate, but each and every number which comes from it and the One is a form, as if Intellect was shaped by the numbers which came to exist in it; but it is shaped in one way by the One and in another by itself, like sight in its actuality; for intellection is seeing sight, and both are one. (v 1, 5)

Meanwhile, whatever comes into being following the activity of the One "necessarily does so while the One remains continually turned towards itself" (v 1, 6). At the moment this turning toward the One occurs, being is constituted, but its arrival remains too late in saying what the One is. John Bussanich

describes this metaphysical impasse by noting that “philosophizing about the One has the concrete aim of nullifying itself, an attitude that is neither nihilist nor antiphilosophical, but which points toward a ‘soteriology’” (Bussanich 1996: 42).

This also seems to be what Bergson means when he writes that it was granted to Plotinus to “look upon the promised land, but not to set foot upon its soil” (Bergson 2006: 221). The Intellect remains exiled from the region from whence it came. The Greek philosopher seemed content to contemplate the incomprehensible from outside it and to maintain the integrity of his own finite position. He thus bars the unintelligibility of mystical thinking from encroaching upon his metaphysical position. Later in this chapter, I will return to this act of turning toward the One in order to understand the comportment of the human observer and the conditions that precipitate it.

The invention of the cinema gave theorists the opportunity to rethink some of the key philosophical problems inspired by the new technology. For Epstein, the task of the cinema, particularly art cinema, is to reveal the inner nature of things, a nature that has been obscured by the exigencies of modern life. In “On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*,” he describes this task in a manner reminiscent of Bergson’s formulation of Plotinus’s position. Epstein writes, “Now we are approaching the promised land, a place of great wonders. (...) A new reality is revealed, a reality for a special occasion, which is untrue to everyday reality just as everyday reality is untrue to the heightened awareness of poetry” (Keller and Paul 2012: 296). A reader of Bergson, Epstein thought of the moving image as granting spectators the opportunity to access the essence of worldly beings, living and non-living, organic and inorganic, as beings becoming in time. To perceive beings in this manner constitutes the very definition of *photogénie*. “We do not look at [objects],” he writes in an essay from 1925, “as they really are. To tell the truth, we are incapable of seeing them as objects” (Abel 1993: 352). We are incapable of seeing objects because our senses and cogitative capacities cannot be separated from our “memories and emotions, the plans or regrets that we have attached to these things for a more or less lengthy period of time, sometime forever” (Abel 1993: 352). Yet beyond the partial and flawed human sensorium that for Epstein impedes access to the phenomenology of things, it is ultimately modernity and its discursive regime that may be held responsible for barring humans from perceiving the world’s vital becoming. All things are subject to explication and instrumentalization according to a totalizing logic of rationality that distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate knowledge.

Paradoxically perhaps, the experience of *photogénie*, that which reveals the enhanced moral character of things beyond capitalist reification, is only

possible through a technology that is intimately imbricated with capitalist modernity. For the first time, the perpetual becoming of the world may be represented visually through technological means. Film and life relate to each other in that both are underpinned by the passing of time. This is why Epstein privileges “mobile aspects of the world, of things and souls,” for “the photogenic aspect of an object is a consequence of its variations in space-time” (Keller and Paul 2012: 294). *Photogénie* may be related to the animistic, particularly in the way in which it restores uncanny life to the image of things embalmed in celluloid. “These lives,” Epstein writes, “are like the life in charms and amulets, the ominous, tabooed objects of certain primitive religions” (Keller and Paul 2012: 294). Things like revolvers and the wheels of a train are enriched by being embedded in time, animated and contextualized within a continuum that spans between past and future, thus gaining in dramatic and affective meaning. They acquire a narrative destiny inextricably linked to their temporalization, so that the revolver comes to embody the burden of remorse, the impulse toward crime, or the anticipation of violence. The close-up shot, in particular, foregrounds this destiny. In an essay from 1921 called “Magnification,” Epstein writes that “The close-up, the keystone of cinema, is the maximum expression of this *photogénie* of movement” (Abel 1993: 236). By restricting vision, the close-up nevertheless guides the viewer’s attention to the visual detail typically overlooked in everyday life. When an object or, especially, a face fills the screen, the background falls away, bestowing things with a living expressivity, the possibility of change in time, which is inseparable from the ontology of the moving image.

Photogénie is only possible through a mode of human vision that is augmented by the technological camera. Functioning as a prosthetic, the camera grants us the capacity to see things persisting in time, a capacity that we have apparently lost, beyond the exchange-value attributed to them by capitalist modernity. “On the screen,” Epstein notes, “we are seeing what the cinema has already seen once: a double transformation, or rather raised to the power of two, since it is multiplied in this way” (Abel 1993: 244). Yet the image does not take us further away from what is depicted, but brings us closer to it, precisely because it is the result of mechanical reproduction. He continues and explains in this regard:

My eye presents me with an idea of a form; the film stock also contains an idea of a form, an idea established independently of my awareness, an idea without awareness, a latent, secret but marvelous idea; and from the screen I get an idea of an idea, my eye’s idea extracted from the camera’s.

ABEL 1993: 236

Beyond conceptual binaries that privilege the original over the copy, the pro-filmic over the cinematic representation, or the human over the machine, Epstein finds that the cinema, in its capacity to technologically enframe and objectify the things it records, provides the precise conditions for perceiving the depicted thing in its purity. Cinema decontextualizes things from their everyday context, presenting them to the spectator so that they may be experienced as if for the first time.

2 *Photogénie in Cœur fidèle*

Epstein was not only a theoretician and poet of the cinema, but was also a filmmaker. In order to make the connection between *photogénie* and the Plotinian One more explicit, I would like to turn to a film he produced in 1923, *Cœur fidèle*. By describing key moments from this work, I will explain how Epstein's film attempts to inspire the experience of *photogénie*. *Cœur fidèle* tells the story of Marie (played by Gina Manès), who, as a little girl, was orphaned and taken in by a bar-owner. Now a young woman, Marie works in her adopted father's tavern in Marseilles but is mistreated. The unemployed and brusque Petit Paul (Edmond van Daële), a regular at the bar, desires her. Marie loves Jean (Léon Mathot) however, who works in the nearby dockyard. They visit each other secretly. Petit Paul forces Marie to go to the fairground, telling her on the wooden horses of a carousel that they will marry one another. Jean follows them and he and Petit Paul engage in a melee. A police officer arrives to break up the fight but he is inadvertently stabbed with a knife. Jean is apprehended while Petit Paul escapes. Jean spends a year in prison and returns, finding Marie with a child. He remains by her, supporting the baby with the help of a kind, handicapped next-door neighbor (Marie Epstein, Jean Epstein's sister). Overhearing a rumor, Petit Paul finds out that Jean had been seeing Marie in their apartment. Inebriated and full of rage, he stumbles back to his apartment with a revolver. Marie's next-door neighbor follows him. As Petit Paul removes the gun from his jacket pocket, Jean pries it out of his hands and the weapon falls to the floor. The next-door neighbor picks up the revolver and shoots Petit Paul. The film ends on Marie and Jean riding the carousel. A close-up reveals their brooding faces.

Throughout *Cœur fidèle*, close-ups propel the narrative drama forward while providing spectators with the opportunity to experience the unique *photogénie* of the cinema. When Jean first goes to Marie's tavern to accost Petit Paul, the face-off and impending physical altercation is depicted through montage. After Jean tells the bar-owner that he knows the old man is not Marie's

biological father, Petit Paul slams his hand on the table and looks menacingly at the young man. The film shows us a series of short shots, quickly alternating between the faces of Petit Paul, Jean, Marie's foster father, several of Petit Paul's thugs, Marie, a close-up of Jean's clenched fists, a hand grasping a bottle by its neck, another hand reaching into a pocket, and Marie holding her face in fear. The fast cutting and pacing of this sequence builds tension. Meanwhile, the bodies on-screen also become tense and ready themselves to fight. A hand becomes a thing readying itself to strike and inflict pain on the face of another. A bottle, unmooring itself from its common understanding as a thing that contains wine, becomes a weapon that will shatter and spill when it is struck against a human head. Through the film image, these things are granted new destinies, new ways of being that do not conform to their everyday understanding. The hardness of a fist or wine bottle comes into view. Through this sequence, above all it is the close-up on the face that manifests these new destinies. The physiognomies of Marie, Petit Paul, and Jean, their furrowed eyebrows, tightened lips, and nervous looks heighten the dramatics of the scene. Meanwhile, fists and bottle enter into relation with human heads. Through the close-up things acquire faces while faces express the fear and anticipation of violence.

Epstein brings the expressivity of the face into further relief by showing close-ups on the main protagonists of *Cœur fidèle*, superimposed with images of rippling water or the movement of fairground amusement rides. While the characters think and silently ruminate on their plight, the movement of these superimposed scenes underscores the life of these still faces, illustrating that they feel and think in time (see figure 2.1).

The well-known sequence that depicts Petit Paul and Marie at the amusement park further illuminates the relationship between human vision and the camera that is central to the realization of *photogénie*. Quick shots of rotating rides, people swinging, ticket machines printing, and animated statues underscore the movement that, for Epstein, is fundamental to the cinematic image. Petit Paul and Marie sit in a circling carousel. The background passes by in a blur and cuts between different perspectives on this revolving movement, producing a dizzying, disorienting effect. Turning left to right, the carousel is shown again several shots later, but in a right to left rotation, confusing matters further. Marie is turned away from her captor and her face remains dejected, her eyes downcast throughout the scene. A sense of chaos swirls around her, as she seems powerless to stop Petit Paul's intimidation. Confetti falls on both of them and flutters in the wind. At one point, he forces her to kiss him. The inevitability and inexorableness of the mechanical movements seem to parallel the inescapability of Petit Paul's actions toward Marie. Mechanical movement



FIGURE 2.1 *Marie and the movement of thought.*
FROM EPSTEIN'S *CŒUR FIDÈLE*.

expresses his coercion, bringing character development, movement, and narrative together through the poetry of the cinema.

Finally, in a scene preceding the climax of the film, Petit Paul, inebriated, listens to a small ensemble of musicians on the street. In the gathered crowd, a woman offers listeners the score of the music that the guitarist, violinist, and flautist are playing so that people can sing or follow along. The viewer is shown close-up shots of fingers strumming guitar strings and a bow moving across a violin. A woman standing behind Petit Paul whispers to him that Jean has gone to his apartment to visit Marie. "They're even writing love letters to one another on a wall in the neighborhood," she remarks, inflaming the drunken man. A shot of the music score of two songs, "La violetera" and "Nuits de chine," are superimposed with a shot of a rotating carousel. While visualizing the music that is being played (a form of art, along with cinema, that is contingent on the unfolding of time), this juxtaposition seems to express Petit Paul's growing anger while expressing an impending sense of chaos. It finds its compositional parallel in the superimpositions of still faces with images of movement. In these shots, inanimate images are given a dramatic destiny, expressing past, present, and future temporalities in a single shot thus realizing Epstein's *photogénie*.

3 The One in *Photogénie*

Earlier I stated that *photogénie* requires the reproduction of an event that has already taken place. It is made possible through an act of retroaction that belongs to the cinema image. I would argue that this act corresponds in many ways to the production of the Intellect and the thinking of being for Plotinus. If the ineffability of the One can be contemplated only after it has generated the Intellect, after the Intellect turns its gaze toward the One, so can *photogénie* only be recognized after the depicted thing or event has been recorded on celluloid and screened to the spectator. Epstein writes that “one runs into a brick wall trying to define it” (Abel 1993: 243) and that *photogénie* is “elusive, it is often trampled underfoot like the promise of riches with which an undiscovered coal seam emblazons the earth” (Abel 1993: 244). He could be speaking about either *photogénie* or the One in these formulations. The creation of the Intellect, and by co-extension the Soul, occurs through procession and return, as by-products of the One. The Intellect, like the cinema image, is belated, made possible by an originating event that temporally precedes it. This attempt to see the unseeable is an attempt to reverse time; it “must return,” Plotinus writes, “so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it (for it faces in both directions); and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect” (II 8, 9, 392–393). Because the Intellect cannot step onto the “promised land” that lies outside its purview, the conceptualization of the ineffable must always arrive after the fact. Similarly, *photogénie* remains theoretically incoherent because its appearance is belated to the event that it (re-)presents. Epstein’s writing style reflects the impossibility of representational thinking to capture the elusiveness of *photogénie*. It is poetic rather than systematic, often taking up a perspective of ecstasy and abundant pleasure instead of one of sober objectivity.

In the final moments of this chapter, I would like to explore some possible ways in which *photogénie* may help us to take steps toward the ultimate aim of Plotinus’s philosophy: reunion with the One. Epstein notes that “the human eye cannot discover [*photogénie*] directly, unless after long practice” (Abel 1993: 244). Throughout his writings, *photogénie* is closely linked to the specific art of the cinema, distinguishing it from other art forms such as theater and painting but, more importantly, from the commercial cinema. He writes that “the cinema is true; a story is false” (Abel 1993: 242) and emphasizes that episodes remain significant for *photogénie*, not five-act narratives that take place over two hours. “If it is too long,” Epstein somewhat defiantly notes, “I don’t find continuous pleasure in it. Intermittent paroxysms affect me the way needles do. Until now, I have never seen an entire minute of pure *photogénie*”

(Abel 1993: 236). Sensitivity to this pure expression of cinema requires a human spectator keyed to its specific means of poetic representation revolving around temporality, the animistic, the physiognomy of things, as well as the fleeting and contingent. It is important to note that *photogénie* is not in the cinema but is a potentiality of the cinema, one that takes place in the relationship between the human spectator and moving image. Such a spectator is one that has been trained to remain open to its possibility.

Epstein does not elaborate the “practice” that one must undergo in order to become sensitive to *photogénie*. But if we can accept that the experience of *photogénie* may be thought of as analogous to the apprehension of the One, then we can turn to Plotinus’s thoughts on the kind of perspective that is required to apprehend the primordial principle that is the aim of his philosophy. The realization of this perspective may be likened to the training of “inner sight” that apprehends beauty, or, as Plotinus puts it, the work required to produce a beautiful statue:

How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop “working on your statue” till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see “self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.” (I 6, 9)

Plotinus notes that the journey back towards the One, this “working on your statue,” begins with the Soul’s contemplation of the splendor of the sensible world and the realization that all things are constituted through the One. This realization is made possible by the self-realization of the Intellect as the principle that makes sense of all things. As we know, it is impossible to know or attribute any properties to the One since it must remain rigorously incomprehensible, and it is because of this negation that any attempt to think it runs the danger that thought itself must be abandoned. Yet approaching this danger is precisely what Plotinus proposes to do. The Soul must both affirm and negate the look in making sense of the One, as he writes:

Therefore one must become Intellect and entrust one’s soul to and set it firmly under Intellect, that it may be awake to receive what that sees, and may by this Intellect behold the One, without adding any

sense-perception or receiving anything from sense-perception into that Intellect, but beholding the most pure with the pure Intellect, and the primary part of Intellect. (VI 9, 3)

The Intellect leads the Soul towards the One, but only up to a point. The Soul comes to realize that all intelligible forms and ideas must be shorn away. Sense-perception, and by co-extension the activity of the Intellect itself, must be given up and the journey towards the One must be guided by a kind of non-thinking. Greater proximity to the One may be realized through some degree of philosophical training, followed by the negation of this training in order that the observer may adopt a kind of non-perspectival perspective appropriate to the One's own intangibility.

The experience made possible by the perspective may be called "mystical." But Plotinus himself speaks of this experience in terms of ecstatic love. Indeed, precisely because the One remains elusive to the Intellect, all the more is it desired and loved. "Truly," Plotinus writes, "when you cannot grasp the form or shape of what is longed for, it would be most longed for and most lovable, and love for it would be immeasurable. For love is not limited here, because neither is the beloved, but the love of this would be unbounded" (VI 7, 32). Presumably endless in quantity and quality, unbounded love is the most appropriate comportment towards the One, itself unbounded and infinite. Such love cannot be contained by the act of understanding compelled by the Intellect. In another passage Plotinus describes the Soul inspired by the realization of worldly beings that evidence the infinite beauty of the One. The Soul "is moved and dances wildly and is all stung with longing and becomes love" (VI 7, 22). Plotinus writes that the Soul that remains in Intellect cannot sense the immeasurable beauty, beyond everyday notions of beauty, of the face of another. "It is as if it was in the presence of a face which is certainly beautiful, but cannot catch the eye because it has no grace playing upon its beauty" (VI 7, 22). In an essay on Plotinus and "Neoplatonist Spirituality," Pierre Hadot describes ecstatic love as a kind of becoming other to oneself:

The soul feels the presence of another with which it is identified, and it is no longer itself. It is transported outside itself and does not know any longer what it is, no longer having the opportunity to consider what it is when it considers the Good.

HADOT 1986: 246

To recognize the unspeakable beyond what we call "beauty," to love that which cannot be seen in the face of the other, is to negate all our mundane,

metaphysical, “aesthetic” concepts of the beautiful face and to affirm the ecstatic response that it inspires.

“Love,” as the very last intertitle of *Cœur fidèle* states, “allows one to forget everything.” Plotinus’s formulations resonate with Epstein’s writings that privilege the image of the face as somehow embodying the epitome of *photogénie*. His essay “Magnification” begins in a particularly emphatic tone: “I will never find the way to say how much I love American close-ups” (Abel 1993: 235). He goes on to convey his excitement at seeing a face in close-up in the cinema, as the face is just about to change and express. This moment of becoming gives him the opportunity to appreciate moments of worldly becoming underscored by the moving image. Notably, it is love that allows him to appreciate these moments:

I love the mouth which is about to speak and holds back, the gesture which hesitates between right and left, the recoil before the leap, and the moment before landing, the becoming, the hesitation, the taut spring, the prelude, and even more than all these, the piano being tuned before the overture. The photogenic is conjugated in the future and in the imperative.

ABEL 1993: 236

His ecstatic love for these moments brings Epstein to the specificity of the moving image. Beyond any systematic theory of film, the representation of becoming is aligned for him with the essence of cinema. “I can see love” (Abel 1993: 238), he writes. Epstein “loves” the moment when the eye lowers its lids, the eyebrow is raised, or when the chin hardens in determination. These moments evidence life evolving in time and are directed toward their destiny to express, to create something from nothing. This seems to be what Epstein means when he writes that the photogenic “is conjugated in the future and in the imperative.”

Conclusion

Photogénie requires that one learn to love the cinema, in a manner that may be described as a kind of ecstatic cinephilia. If we accept that contemplation of the One may be thought analogously to the elusive essence of cinema, one must prepare oneself to experience this moment of exstasis, to stand firm before the experience of terror and astonishment inspired by the moving image. Typically, this experience is foreclosed to us because we understand the image straightforwardly, as simply mimetic to the things it signifies. The Platonic

(and indeed Neoplatonic) hierarchy of image and idea is reiterated here. We remain chained to our screens and believe that the play of projected images corresponds to reality. Both Plotinus and Epstein point to another principle beyond representation that can only be accessed by giving up this typical understanding of what images can do. Seeing *photogénie* means overcoming the binary between seer and seen that typically subtends the act of visual perception. Plotinus writes about seeing the One:

When therefore the seer sees himself, then when he sees, he will see himself as like this, or rather he will be in union with himself as like this and will be aware of himself as like this since he has become single and simple. But perhaps one should not say “will see,” but “was seen,” if one must speak of these as two, the seer and the seen, and not both as one—a bold statement. So then the seer does not see and does not distinguish and does not imagine two, but it is as if he had become someone else and he is not himself and does not count as his own there, but has come to belong to that and so is one, having joined, as it were center to center. (VI 9, 10)

The distinction between seer and seen, between subject and object, is collapsed. The world is not perceived from a timeless place outside it, but is sympathized with, loved, and lived by the cinephiliac in synchronicity with the world's perpetual becoming. The seer does not simply see, but “was seen,” significant in that the union of subject and object also involves a collapse of present and past tenses. The seer sees something yet also senses the nothingness that the something becomes as it sinks into memory. To affirm these vacillations, to understand how the Intellect both illuminates and obscures knowledge, is to begin to see the unseeable.

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Is the Universe a Work of Art that We Can Perceive in a Film?

Tony Partridge

I was once hiking with a little boy in the woods. He told me: “there are mosquitoes here.” I asked him why we can’t see them. “Because they’re too small,” he replied. Then he told me: “there are also lions here.” I asked him why we can’t see them. “Because they’re too big.”

PAVEL FLORENSKY (2014: 21)



Andrei Tarkovsky’s film images hint at something other, something beyond the ostensibly realistic physical and earthy objects that he often pans over with his camera. His images refer beyond themselves and through these images everything in the world is a “miracle” (Tarkovsky 1987: 16; Garrett 1990: 311; Kieślowski 1993: 195; Martin 2005: 26; McCormick 2006: 66–68). Tarkovsky developed a filmic language to speak about the ineffable (Tarkovsky 1989: 11; Garrett 1990: 303; Lawton 1991: 160; Josephson 1993: 7; Synessios 2001: 65; Král 2001: 258–268; Schreck 2001: 13–14), a language he uses to evoke spiritual depth and revelation in his viewers (Partridge & Diaz-Caneja 2011). This is particularly the case in his last three films, *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986). I argue that, in doing this, Tarkovsky uses ideas derived from the philosophy of Plotinus, ideas which have been filtered through later philosophers and philosophies that are often based on Russian Orthodox thinking.

For Plotinus, the transcendent One, rather than man, is at the center of the universe. The One is ineffable and we can only notice the One through its traces in the Intellect, the Soul and the material world (v 3, 13; v 3, 14; VI 8, 13; Henry 1991: lviii–lxix). Are Tarkovsky’s films then a direct reading of Plotinus and his philosophy of the One? Touching the elements of water, earth, fire and touching vegetation in his filmic images, is Tarkovsky teaching us to aspire to touch the traces of the One as stepping stones to becoming closer to the One itself? Can the viewer of a Tarkovsky film experience something of this sort?

Do viewers then identify with his characters, individuals who seek simplicity, virtue and thus integration with the One? I argue that Tarkovsky's films are, in fact, a reading of Plotinus's thought as this is filtered through Tarkovsky's reading of Russian Silver Age philosophers. In particular, Tarkovsky was deeply influenced by the ideas of Pavel Florensky (Tarkovsky 1986: 82; 1989: 217; 1993: 413; 416; Källemark 2006: 136; Menzel 2008: 375; Moroz 2008: 35) and Simeon Frank (Menzel 2008: 375; Moroz 2008, 36; 118; 121), both of whom were strongly influenced by Plotinus (Partridge 2013: 133–138; Frank 1965: xiv). Florensky's arguments are often similar to those of Plotinus (Partridge 2013: 133–138) and Florensky even quotes Plotinus to justify his arguments (Florensky 1997: 470; 521). Frank has stated explicitly that his thought was influenced by Plotinus (Frank 1965: xiv). Thus, my thesis is that Tarkovsky read the works of Florensky and Frank, both of whom were strongly influenced by Plotinus's philosophy of the One, and that this philosophy influenced Tarkovsky's films.

1 Tarkovsky's Filmic Images Aspire to the Spiritual

According to Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, "Tarkovsky developed his ideas on time and cinema by overcoming the most important cinematic principle of modernity: the Formalist method of montage" (Betz-Bornstein 2007: 1). However, Tarkovsky overcame montage to a purpose and that purpose was to say something deeply philosophical. Indeed, in his films, he seeks to express deeply religious ideas that can be derived from a close reading of Plotinus, especially as this Greek thinker is reflected in the philosophies of Florensky and Frank (Partridge and Diaz-Caneja 2011; Partridge 2013). But Tarkovsky isn't just a disciple of Plotinus. Rather, Tarkovsky read Russian Silver Age philosophical texts that were influenced by Plotinus and these strands of thought have left an imprint on Tarkovsky's work (Tarkovsky 1986: 82; 2004: 413; Källemark 2006: 136; 138; Menzel 2008: 378; Moroz 2008: 35–36; 83–84; 118).

Tarkovsky began to fully articulate these ideas in his last three films. Before this, in his first four films, Tarkovsky was essentially finding his language to speak. In *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), he showed that dreams can be shown to important effect in film (Tarkovsky 1986: 29). In *Andrei Rublyov* (1966), he showed that the flow of history, the flow of time and the flow of dream can all be made into a coherent narrative film that slips between the personal and the culturally relevant historical language as it is shown in epic cinema (Tarkovsky 1962: 548–552). By *Solaris* (1972), Tarkovsky had begun to speak about the nature of reality and memory as he stretched the dream-world into a kind of pseudo-reality, one that affects the viewer more than any so-called objective

reality (Abramov 2006: 32–37). In *Mirror* (1975), Tarkovsky personalized all of this, literally laying his soul bare, then his family's soul and even stretching to the soul of recent Russian history (Tarkovsky 1989: 367–370). But with *Stalker* (1979), and then with the subsequent films, *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986), Tarkovsky addresses the primary issues that he wants to speak about and whether or not he succeeds in making successful and interesting films is almost irrelevant to this primary purpose. Tarkovsky has found his voice and he wants to speak.

Tarkovsky has things to say and, by this time, he has developed the language by which he will say it. Botz-Bornstein discussion about dream and time and truth and rhythms is, very essentially, true. However, when we move to linking Plotinus and Tarkovsky together—especially in Tarkovsky's later films—we must move over to what exactly Tarkovsky seeks to do with his new language of cinema, what he seeks to actually say. Now, all discussion of time and montage and intellect and wisdom are subservient to what he wishes to say and what he wishes to say is very close to the thinking of Plotinus as this Greek thinker's thought is filtered through the many writings that Tarkovsky refers to in his diaries from this period (Tarkovsky 1989; 1993). The genesis of many of Tarkovsky's ideas can be found in his diaries and in the mid-1970s he largely shifts from writing about the nature of cinema to writing about more spiritual, philosophical and religious matters. This change in emphasis coincides with his close reading of philosophical and religious texts. Now, Tarkovsky links his filmic images with his spiritual aspirations. These images often hint at something other, something beyond the ostensibly realistic, the quite physical or earthy objects that he very often pans slowly across. According to the Russian philosopher Grigory Pomerants, Tarkovsky's images move between depth and surface. On the surface there is a physicality, a realism of texture and earthy reality, but this reflects a deeper, more formal beauty underneath. In a filmed interview, Pomerants describes Tarkovsky's filmic images as “a spiritual ocean in which all the visible and tangible swims” (Tarkovsky 2008: npn).

Pavel Florensky describes how the art theorist Pavel Muratov relates Russian art to physicality, specifically to the physicality of a Greek sculpture. Muratov describes seeing rose petals lodged in the folds of a woman's dress in a Greek sculpture and that these are “a far greater adornment than all the connoisseurs' opinions and scholars' arguments” (Florensky 2002: 103). For Muratov, and latterly for Florensky, the palpability of those rose petals seems profound. They lodge, like our fingertips, inside the folds of the sculpture. They touch the marble. Muratov also looks at the shadows of branches and leaves as these too are seen on the surface of the sculpture. These are things that barely touch. They are ineffable, but are also real facts. Adding a gust of wind, these shadows

scurry like lizards across the marble. The shadows become like lizards and they bridge a link between “the ancient world and our own, the only way in which our heart can come to know and believe in this life” (103–4). These lizards and shadows and rose petals literally live and Muratov argues that, from this life, we can know the life of the sculpture and actually believe in it and that this belief, this knowledge, comes from our heart. Muratov is here seeking to release secrets hidden within the depths of the sculpture. There is a scene in Tarkovsky’s 1982 documentary, *Tempo di Viaggio*, where Andrei Tarkovsky and Tonino Guerra go in search of rose petals. These rose petals were not lying on a Greek sculpture but they are embedded in the marble floor of a palace in Sorrento. In Tarkovsky’s documentary, he arrives at this palace and finds it completely closed up. He and Guerra can only view photos of the floor in a glossy magazine that is shown to them by the caretaker. Yet Tarkovsky found this scene was important enough to include it in his documentary. Why is this? The obvious reason is that the rose petal floor was originally constructed for a Russian princess whose name was Gorchakov, the name that Tarkovsky went on to use for his hero in the film *Nostalghia*. However, at this stage in his career, Tarkovsky was decorating his films with piled layers of flimsy and often nebulous physical phenomena, from water to wind to shadows to dust and dirt. All of these are then placed in his films, often covered in water, and used to connect with a hidden depth that lies somewhere beneath. What is he seeking to show? For Pomerants, it is “the fleetingness of truth which is too multi-dimensional for human language” (Pomerants 2004: 45–46) and “The fullness of truth comes to us in silence” (54–5). Robert Bird describes Florensky’s influence on Tarkovsky: “Florensky sees the process of cognition as ‘creating on the lower planes’ models and schemes and on higher planes—symbols” (Hunter Blair 2014: 23).

I argue that these descriptions are close to Plotinus’s discussion of the ineffable, in particular, the connections between the lower hypostases and the One. I argue that Andrei Tarkovsky’s films seek to connect with hidden depth and that he uses methods like those described by Muratov and Florensky, but also the philosophy of Simeon Frank, to seek the ineffable through the physical and the earthy. Plotinus speaks about the One, this despite the fact that the One is ineffable (V 3, 13; V 3, 14; VI 8, 13). The only place where language can be found is where duality occurs, that is in the hypostases that lie below the One (V 1, 5, 4–12; VI 8, 13, 1–4; Rist, 1967: 27). According to Plotinus, we can speak about the One only if there is a trace of the One in these lower hypostases (Rist 1967: 21; Heiser 1991: 66–67; Nikulin 1998: 330–332). Plotinus speaks about the One and, in speaking, he uses images from the sense of touch, suggesting intimacy, to speak of our aspiration to reach the One (III 8, 10, 31–35; VI 7, 36, 4; VI 9, 4, 27; Wallis: 1995, 88–89). The words he uses name, but do not describe.

The One is attainable but not describable (VI 7, 27, 24–7; Wallis 1995: 59). There is, however, a place where Intellect touches the One (VI 9, 10, 14–17; IV 8, 1, 1–11; Rist 1967: 50–51). By developing virtues in ourselves, we can identify with, and thereby love and touch, and thus come to rest in the One (V 5, 8, 10–14). Plotinus argues that by intimately engaging with the traces of the One in the lower hypostases, we can name the One and thereby aspire to reach it. I argue that we can see similar traces to those described by Plotinus in the films of Tarkovsky, but here the traces are filmic images rather than words. Tarkovsky's traces reach out towards a kind of physical contact that mirrors that physical and earthy language used by Plotinus when he calls, or names, the One (Král 1990: 258–268; Lawton 1991: 160; Synessios 2001: 65; Bird 2008: 152).

Tarkovsky read both Florensky and Frank and, especially in his last three films, Tarkovsky's filmic images hint at something other, something that cannot be referred to directly. Matter—for instance, the dust or mud—is almost palpable in Tarkovsky's films and yet it isn't the material fact itself that is on display. After all, the cinematic image is never itself the mud or matter. It is an image, or series of images, of mud and matter. In this, it is a visual image that reflects the mood redolent of some other, a strange juxtaposition of objects that, combined, refers beyond itself. To this extent, it is ineffable and it is a miracle. Florensky, in line with many Middle Platonists (Dillon 1977), believed that everything in the world is a miracle (Florensky 1967: 89–90), and possibly the spoken thoughts of God (237). Philip Strick, interviewing Tarkovsky, has indicated that Tarkovsky also believed something similar (Strick 2006: 72). But how does this link up with Plotinus, and specifically with Plotinus's philosophy of the One?

2 Plotinus's Philosophy of the One and Its Relationship to Florensky and Frank

I will describe Plotinus's thought and show how his ideas of the One are strongly reflected in the Christian philosophies of Florensky and Frank. Then, given that Tarkovsky read these Russian philosophers, I will summarize how these ideas can also be seen in the ideas and films of Tarkovsky. I will follow this path under six headings, each of which are an important aspect of Plotinus's philosophy of the One. These headings are: The Ineffable One and our Aspiration to Achieve it; Traces of the One in the Lower Hypostases; The One is Attainable, but not Describable; Words that Reflect the Physical are Used to Describe our Engagement with the One; Improper Speech and Antinomian Thinking; and The Transfiguration of Man. It is my primary aim to show that an aspiration to

reach the One of Plotinus, though redefined in Christian terms, underlies some of the most important images in Tarkovsky's films.

2.1 *The Ineffable One and Our Aspiration to Achieve It*

In Plotinus, the universe, including the transcendent One, is at the center of everything and man is just a cypher, a minor aspect of something greater than himself (Henry 1991: lviii–lxix). Man's role in the cosmos is to seek purification in order to transcend his minor aspect and achieve integration with the One (V 4, 1, 26–34; V 7, 36, 4–26; VI 7, 25, 17–18). Therefore, in his philosophy of the One, Plotinus is seeking to stretch his consciousness beyond Intellect into absolute simplicity (III 8, 9, 43–44; V 1, 5, 4–6; V 3, 13, 18–19).¹ Plotinus seeks synonyms for the supremely simple and he comes up with “the One” and “the Good.” These are words that “call” or “name” rather than “predicate” or “describe” (Rist 1967: 47; Heiser 1991: 59–61; Wallis 1995: 59; Nikulin 1998: 330). Plotinus concludes “that we must postulate over and beyond the divine intellect, an ultimate cause which would be absolutely simple, the ‘One’” (O'Meara 1993: 44–45). He is presenting a method for speaking about that which we can recognize but cannot describe (V 3, 13; V 3, 14; VI 8, 13).

Similar views are expressed in the philosophies of Florensky and Frank. Florensky's main philosophical text is *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914), though his later works *At the Crossroads of Science & Mysticism* (1917–21) and *Iconostasis* (1922) are also important. Frank's main texts, and certainly those that are closest to Plotinus in its philosophy, are *The Unknowable* (1939) and *Reality and Man* (1956). For Florensky, “Only One abides, only in him are constancy, life and peace” (Florensky 1997: 12). Florensky uses the terms “Truth,” “Good” and “Beauty” to name the One of Plotinus (56). Then, “Light is the Truth, and this Truth unfailingly manifests itself” (65). Florensky often writes about the aspiration to achieve the One (Florensky 2014: 55; 131; 134–135; 140–141; Pyman 2010: 78). Frank uses the terms “reality,” “primordial ground” and “God” to name the One. “The primordial ground is precisely nothing else but the ineffable ultimate depth, the ultimate foundation, the ultimate reason why anything at all exists” (Frank 1983: 204–205). According to Philip Boobbyer, Frank's biographer, “An examination of the limitation of reason leads Frank to assert the presence of a primary foundation for all things, which he calls God.

1 For Plotinus, consciousness is derived from Intellect: it is the action of the law of Intellect, which is the aspiration of the Soul to reach the Intellect and latterly the One. It is the motion of aspiration when the culmination of consciousness is unity (see IV.3.10–13; 18; 25–6; IV.4.1–2; 12–13; IV.7.35; Hutchinson, 2015, 153–4; 162).

This God is unfathomable, for to understand him would be to say something about him, and that would be to limit him to the finite. He is thus transfinite" (Booboyer 1995: 167). Frank quotes descriptions of the One directly from Plotinus (205). Following Plotinus, both Florensky and Frank speak about purification. For Florensky, purification is possible only through man's deification, through the acquisition of love as the Divine Essence (Florensky 1997: 56; 59). Sainly ascetics possess spiritual beauty and the light of Divine knowledge is the possession of a purified person (72–3). Alongside the lower man, there is a higher one (521). Frank refers to values as the true path towards the One and, in this, man obeys "the call of higher forces" (Frank 1983: 165; 169). What are these virtues? They are suffering and the consciousness of our responsibility and guilt for evil, but only when this suffering is properly conducted, when "the soul opened into its own depths" (296). Like Plotinus, "Frank is trying to tell his readers about something that cannot, strictly speaking, be described in language" (Booboyer 1995: 166). He is trying to engage, verbally, with the utterly simple. Frank discusses the ineffability of the utterly simple and, in his philosophy, he seeks a method by which he may speak about it. God is "unfathomable" or "unknowable" (167). "All judgments and theories touch only the surface of being, its 'veil,' and not the reality concealed behind it" (Frank 1983: 69). The object of knowledge is total-unity, a realm where "distinctions and differences, which are the essence of logic, are overcome (...) [and the] mind, then, is directed at an unknowable realm" (Booboyer 1995: 86).

Similar views are expressed by Tarkovsky. He echoes Frank in his strong focus on suffering and responsibility (Tarkovsky 1989: 297; Golstein 2008: 199) and, then, regarding the aspiration to reach the One, Tarkovsky asserts that "the entire point of human existence consists in using the time allotted to you to take at least one step away from the level upon which you were born up to a higher level. This is the meaning of life" (Ishimov and Shejko 2006: 152). He adds that, "anyone who does not aspire to greatness of soul is worthless; as insignificant as a field mouse or a fox (...) For man, who is unable to grasp the essence of what lies beyond, the unknown—the unknowable—is GOD" (Tarkovsky 1989: 11). Tarkovsky focuses on himself: "I must become more profound and spiritual. And only after that maybe I'll be able to do something good. And how can we rely on some changes if we, ourselves, don't feel sufficiently spiritually developed" (Demant 1990: 340). The alternative to this is that we are isolated from other men, like a singer in a choir who does not join in, who "no longer believes in the importance of his own, personal actions" (Hoberman and Bachmann 2006: 93). Tarkovsky believes that "there is nothing more beautiful and mysterious than simplicity. But how can simplicity be achieved?" (Garrett 1990: 303). In his films, Tarkovsky's characters experience suffering

and this sense of responsibility, especially *Stalker*, *Domenico*, *Gorchakov* and *Alexander*. All of these characters are aspiring to something greater than their ordinary lives.

2.2 *Traces of the One in the Lower Hypostases*

Plotinus argues that the only place where language can be found is in the hypostases that lie below the One (V 1, 5, 4–12; VI 8, 13, 1–4; Rist, 1967, 27). But this happens only if there is a trace of the One in these lower hypostases, that is, in the places where language actually occurs. Then, by reading this trace, this “footprint in the sand” (Rist 1967: 27), we can connect with the One. We engage with traces, though not directly and immediately with the One itself. But, through these traces, we can aspire to the One. It is very important to realize that there is no other way we can speak about the One except via the lower hypostases (VI.7.8.18; cf. Nikulin 1998: 331–332). Yet, despite the fact that the One, in its innate simplicity, lies outside and somehow above these other hypostases, it is also paradoxically within them, about them and away from them all at once (III 8, 9, 25; III 9, 4, 1–9; VI 9, 8, 34–45). Plotinus’s position on the simple unity of the One is in contrast to Aristotle’s primacy of the Divine Mind (Rist 1967: 47; O’Meara 1996: 76–77), a view that Aristotle shared with quite a number of Platonist philosophers (Jones 1926: 317, 325; Armstrong 1953: 18–19, 35, 37; Rich 1954: 126–131; Rist 1967: 38; Dillon 1977: 28–29; Henry 1991: liv; Wallis 1995: 54). We must remember that Plotinus is working here with language. He is describing realities and switching between metaphor and rational arguments, using the same words in different contexts with different nuances and meanings attached to them (Lekkas 2005: 55–56). Now language involves duality and there is no duality in the One (V 1, 5, 4–12; VI 8, 13, 1–4). But by using language to refer to the traces of the One, the words he uses can somehow connect with the One (Heiser 1991: 66–67). Why? Because “the perfection and purity of the three levels are designated by the everlasting illumination of the One” (Stamatellos 2007: 10). Here, the words and phrases that Plotinus uses to speak about the One seem to be the next best thing to pointing at, or indicating, the One, in a kind of verbal gesture. Then, attaining the One is not a vision but an experience, it is not a trace but a union (Meijer 1992: 276). The person is “carried away or inspired by divinity” (277) and, in this, they are “solitary” or “lonely.” Theirs is then an essential simplicity (280–1).

Florensky also writes about the traces of the One (Florensky 2014: 59–60; 127; 135; 137), but that knowledge of the One cannot “clarify with words this ineffable depth of mystery” (Florensky 1997: 42) because the One “is absolutely indivisible into units” (78). However, Florensky views the religious icon as “a direct expression of divinity,” holding that “the most persuasive philosophical

proof of God's existence is the one the textbooks never mention, the conclusion to which can express the whole meaning. There exists the icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublyov; therefore, God exists!" (Florensky 1996: 68; Bird 2004: 76). For Frank, we can speak and think about the One, but we cannot express and think the One itself (Frank 1983: 29). There is evidence of the One in multiplicity and Frank builds a repertoire of empirical evidence for traces of the One. He uses the word "revelation" for this seeking (172–3). From these traces, we can gain a sense of the underlying unity, or simplicity, of the One, but we cannot describe it. In fact, "we must face the fact that even the most subtle and exact theory is adequate to the transdefinite essence of reality only the way (to cite Goethe) that a 'well-built cross' suits the living body that is crucified upon it" (33). Frank adds that, "the attentive gaze that penetrates into the genuine essence of things sees the immeasurable and the indefinable abyss of the transdefinite revealed in every point of being" (39). Everything is a trace of the One, "everything else resembles Divinity in some sense" (220). Therefore, the One "belongs" to the traces, as the traces belong to the One. He then concludes that, "philosophy is the rational transcendence of the limitations of rational thought" (Frank 1965: 44). Frank uses an argument taken directly from Plotinus, that "just as we could not see the sun if our eye were not similar to it, so we could not seek and apprehend God if we were not akin to Him" (Frank 1965: 115; V 1, 6, 28–40; V 3, 12, 39–44; V 4, 1, 23–41). From this, he argues that "it is as a creator that man is most conscious of himself as 'the image and likeness' of God" (156). "Man as creator is a co-partner in God's creativeness" because God "bestows on His creatures a measure of His own creative power, i.e., He *creates creators*. God creates derivatively creative beings, and grants His creatures a share in His own creativeness" (156–7). For Florensky, "the essence of human being is the image of God" (Florensky 1996: 55). Both agree that the creative artist must aspire to the One, or in Christian terms to aspire to "the image and likeness of God," and doing this is to be creative as God is creative. How is this to be achieved? By nurturing virtues, by suffering, by creating images, words and religious icons (Bird 2004: 76).

Tarkovsky uses the ineffable in his films: "In general ... I view words as noises made by men" (Skakov 2012: 123) and Nariman Skakov describes how, "time and again in the journey through the Zone, Writer and Professor's dialogue functions as a superfluous and often deceptive overlay to other more vital elements" (123–124). Erland Josephson also suggests that Tarkovsky's filmic images are often traces of the One: "That the smoke and the moist and the damp do not hide anything but signify the presence of God" (Josephson 1993: 7). For Natasha Synessios, "Tarkovsky moved trees, added branches, painted leaves, doing everything in his power to make nature come alive, to reveal the

forces that live within it" (Synessios 2001: 65), a view that Tarkovsky confirms (Tarkovsky 1986: 37–39; 106; 109–10; Josephson 1986: 329; Menzel 2008: 378). Tarkovsky describes "art as prayer" (Cossé 2006: 166; Johnson 2006: 175; Sarkar 2008: 256) and, echoing Florensky, he also says that art is a miracle (Tarkovsky 1987: 16; Garrett 1990: 311; Kieślowski 1993: 195; Florensky 1997: 90). Frank calls man "a being that consciously takes part in God's creativeness," that he is God's free "creative co-worker" (159) and Tarkovsky asserts that, "man is created in the image and likeness of God. In other words, he has freedom of will and he is able to create" (Tarkovsky 1987: 10). Tarkovsky affirms that the artist as creator is as the Creator Himself (Garrett 1990: 310; Demant 1990: 335; Cossé 2006: 170; Moroz 2008: 83–84).

2.3 *The One is Attainable, but Not Describable*

Plotinus also uses the phrase "the Good" to name the One. In the world our desire for the good is founded on "the Good" as first principle, which means that we can recognize the Good but that this recognition is not because of our desire but because the truly good really exists (VI 7, 8, 17–32). "Plotinus follows Aristotle in claiming that the good is attainable," and "when it is attained our most fundamental desire is satisfied and we are content and happy" (Wittala 2013: 660). Thus, in recognising determinate good things, we begin to see a hierarchy of goods that are separate from our particular desires and then over time, and with experience, we see higher and higher goods until we eventually "hit upon the Good which grounds that hierarchy" (662). It is through our experience of desire in this context that we become aware of the Good, and aspire to it through our desire to reach the highest point of an attainable hierarchy of goods. However, we use the word "Good" here to recognise the Good, not to describe it (VI 7, 27, 24–7; Wallis 1995: 59). This is an important distinction, because the moment we describe we turn the Good into a multiplicity that is alien to Plotinus's highest principle. Therefore, the Good is attainable, but not describable.

For Florensky, the Good is also an equivalent of the One (Florensky 1997: 56) and Frank actually believes that he serves the good, a word that names "reality," Frank's name for the One (Frank 1983: 169). That the Good, and therefore the One, is attainable is attested by Florensky: "The righteous have wholeheartedly striven toward the 'Invisible' Heaven, toward the Heaven not given to them, and Heaven received them" (Florensky 1997: 55). Thus, for Florensky and Frank, the One is attainable, but not describable (Frank 1983: xx; Florensky 1997: 56; 73; 78).

Tarkovsky quotes his father writing that "Good is passive. And evil is active" (Tarkovsky 1989: 20; Surkova 1985). Tarkovsky associates the good with

creativity: "The process of creativity is not completed with the creation of the artwork, because the 'real life' of an artwork starts after its separation from the artist. (...) It becomes a part of our soul and participation in shaping our spirituality and it prepares us to accept the 'Good'" (Moroz 2008: 91). In this process, "Art prepares us for something higher. Art reminds us about our source and where we come from" (91–2). Tarkovsky believes that the artist creates the image as a "detector of the absolute" (Tarkovsky 1986: 37). In the artistic image, "one thing is substituted for another, the smaller for the greater (...) [and] the infinite cannot be made into matter, but it is possible to create an illusion of the infinite: the image" (38). "Touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that same call of truth which prompted the artist to his creative act" (43). This "opens up before us the possibility of interaction with infinity, for the function of the artistic image is to be a kind of detector of infinity" (109). "In a word, the image is not a certain *meaning*, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as in a drop of water" (110). Thus, Tarkovsky is arguing that it is through our desire for the good, especially the good in the artistic image that we aspire to the One and that, through the creative act, the One is attainable.

2.4 *Words that Reflect the Physical are Used to Describe Our Engagement with the One*

A very important aspect of Plotinus's thought is that sometimes he uses words that reflect the physical aspects of life, words that are then reflected back towards the One. For example, he speaks of the touching of the good, the grasping and touching of the One (VI 7, 36, 4; VI 9, 4, 27). Plotinus argues that the One is in the beings that truly exist, it is "their highest origin and spring and production power" (III 8, 10, 25–6, Armstrong translation). Then Plotinus describes a near physical embracing of the One through its traces, a near physical loving of its traces which occur in being. Thus, he suggests that we can come to embrace the One through a kind of grasping of its traces in the lower hypostases (III 8, 10, 31–5). Then, "his frequent preference for metaphors drawn from the sense of touch [suggest] intimacy between the experiencer and his object (e.g., V 3, 17, 25; VI 7, 36, 4; VI 9, 4, 27); elsewhere he refers simply to a 'presence superior to knowledge' (VI 9, 4, 3)" (cf. Wallis 1995: 88–89).

Frank uses similar language to describe the aesthetic experience: "At moments of aesthetic experience we no longer feel lonely, for we enter into communion with something in the external world which is akin to us. That which is eternal to us ceases to be a part of the cold and indifferent objective world, and we are conscious of its kinship with our own being" (Frank 1983: 57). A physical-like connection that occurs in the aesthetic experience is

also referred to by Florensky when he discusses the rose petals and the ancient Greek statue (Florensky 2002: 103–104), see Section 1, above.

In Tarkovsky's filmic images, we can often imagine that we have come upon a footprint in the sand, that we put our fingers delicately into that footprint and then allow a few grains of sand to fall between our fingers. This relationship we are having with the footprint, and through it with the person who walked across the sands sometime before, is redolent of the relationship that, in Plotinus and Tarkovsky, we may have with the One. By touching the footprint we have somehow attained a greater closeness with the One who is not itself altogether there and yet the One is, in a real though nebulous sense, still somehow connected with this footprint. The narrator in Chris Marker's documentary *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevitch* (1999), describes this palpability in Tarkovsky's films as follows:

There is nothing more earthy, more carnal, than the work of this reputed mystical filmmaker. Maybe because Russian mysticism is not that of Catholics, terrified by nature and the body. Among the Orthodox, nature is respected. The Creator is revered through his creation.

Dialogue in C. MARKER'S *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevitch*, 1999.

2.5 *Improper Speech and Antinomian Thinking*

Plotinus uses a hierarchy of words, with some words seemingly closer to the One itself than others. For instance, it seems that “the Good” is closer to the One than the word “Beauty,” though Plotinus does use a slightly higher term than the latter, namely “a beauty that makes beauty” (VI 7, 32, 33, Armstrong translation). But all of these words are what Plotinus terms “improper speech,” that is a kind of speech which seeks to persuade us to aspire to, or desire, the One, but does not seek to describe the One (VI 8, 10; cf. Rist 1967: 79). Then, to speak of the One is to name the One, but it is also to speak of our aspiration to reach the One (Corrigan 1996: 117). Despite this aspiration, we are unable to reach the kind of knowledge that Plotinus attributes to the One because our thinking, even at the highest point in its aspirations, must remain a thinking that is indelibly linked with the Intelligible world. Thus, even though reaching the One is an attainable goal, in thinking and speaking about the One we must nevertheless always, and inevitably, remain short of this goal.² Alongside his

² In IV.8.1, Plotinus describes Heraclitus's description of the ascent, and descent, using metaphor, but adds that “change reposes.” Plato speaks of guilt “at the arrival of soul at body” though “the soul was given by the goodness of the creator to the end that the total of things

emphasis on words that name, Plotinus also uses metaphor and analogies (I 1, 12, 32–9; III 8, 10, 5–13; IV 3, 27, 1–14; V 8, 9), rational arguments (I 2, 3, 12–32; I 8, 7; III 8, 9), that are sometimes also linked with analogy and metaphor (VI 9, 8, 34–45), and negative theology (III 9, 9, 1; V 3, 14, 19; V 4, 2, 3; V 7, 35, 43; Armstrong 1953: 18–19; Nikulin 1998: 328–331). But there is a positivity, a liveliness and life about all these descriptions, particularly in terms of the desire or aspirations we have to join with the highest hypostasis (Dillon 1992: 196). The negative theology used by Plotinus (V 3, 14, 5–7) had a great influence on later Neoplatonic thinking, and particularly on the Christian thought of Dionysius the Areopagite (see Stamatellos 2007: 35), though, in Plotinus, this thought is often derived from earlier thinking, especially from Heraclitus. Heraclitus uses unity-in-opposition (Fr. 51, 67, 88), a nascent form of what later became known as antinomian thinking (Heraclitus 1987: 37; 45; 53). Stamatellos links these fragments with Plotinus (e.g., II 3, 16, 53–4; III 3, 1, 9–12) and, in fact, Plotinus emphasizes that all “entwines into a unity (...) even of sources frankly opposite” (IV 4, 38, 17–19; cf. Stamatellos 2007: 46). From Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite develops his own negative theology, but he also says that “God is known through Knowledge and through Unknowing” (Dionysius the Areopagite 2000: 78–79). This transforms the opposites-in-unity of Heraclitus and Plotinus (84; 85; 102) into antinomian thinking that deeply influenced Nicholas of Cusa (Nicholas of Cusa 1997: 107, 110). Cusa developed his “learned ignorance,” based on negative theology (89; 91; 107), then he described antinomian thinking as thinking where “contradiction is without contradiction because it is infinity” (259, see also 251, 254). It is in the mundane, in the childish, in the frankly irrational, in contradiction, that the gateway to paradise slips open or becomes ever so slightly ajar (297).

Frank uses the word “babbling” for the “improper speech” of Plotinus (Frank 1983: xi) and adds that, in relation to the One, “all words are inevitably inappropriate” (73), they are “noise and smoke” (210). Frank takes the term “wise ignorance” from Dionysius the Areopagite, and asserts that “the most divine knowledge of God is that which is acquired through ignorance” (181). The One is “unknowable” and we must move beyond the law of contradiction, into antinomian thought (Frank 1965: 40). Frank says that the word of man is a reflection of the word of God and that the word of God does not “speak *about* anything” but “speaks about itself, expresses itself” (Frank 1983: 233). Frank quotes Nicholas of Cusa that, “the unattainable is attained through its unattainment” (Boobhyer 1995: 166). For Florensky, “no human powers can analyze the Infinite unit, just as they cannot synthesize it” (Florensky 1997: 78). Florensky, like Frank, argues

might be possessed of intellect” (McKenna translation). Thus, there is a tension in Plotinus regarding descriptions within the intelligible world of the experience of attaining the One.

for antinomian thinking (Florensky 1997: 106–123; 2014: 124; Pyman 2010: 33), a thinking where “inner contradiction is a sign not of falseness, but of inner honesty” (Florensky 2014: 5). But true knowledge “is possible only through the transubstantiation of man, through his deification, through the acquisition of love as the Divine essence” (Florensky 1997: 56). Icons are windows to this divine world, “the embodiment of a meditation, an inscription, entrance or exit to and from another internal world” (Menzel 2008: 378).

Tarkovsky was fascinated by a passage in the Book of Revelation: “And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not’ (Revelation 10: 4).” He concludes from this that “in human ignorance lies hope. Ignorance is noble. Knowledge is vulgar” (Tarkovsky 1987: 16). Tarkovsky combines, in his films, the ineffability of improper speech with the antinomian thinking described by Florensky and Frank. For instance, in *Nostalghia* where Domenico says, “Excuse me, Miss, I don’t smoke but could I have a cigarette?” or, later, when speaking to Gorchakov, “When I don’t know what to do I ask for a cigarette, too. But I’ve never learned to smoke. It’s too hard. You have to learn to not smoke to do important things.” Then, written on the wall in Domenico’s house we see, “ $1 + 1 = 1$ ” and Domenico himself says “One drop plus one drop makes a bigger drop, not two,” alluding to the ineffability of the simplest mathematical laws (*Nostalghia* 1982: npn). There are other, similar incidences, like when he uses L-cuts or incongruous sounds like falling coins or when his characters trip. Yet in his films these incongruous incidents and dialogue cohere into a unity that makes spiritual sense despite, or because of, this incongruity. Tarkovsky also alludes to the aspiration to reach the One, though following Florensky and Frank he couches this in Christian terms (Ishimov and Shejko 2006: 152; Cossé 2006: 166; Le Fanu 1986; Demant 1990: 340). Tarkovsky echoes Florensky’s and Frank’s thought on many occasions, for instance, “The idea of infinity cannot be expressed in words or even described, but it can be apprehended through art, which makes infinity tangible” (Tarkovsky 1986: 38–39). This is also similar to the tangibility expressed by Plotinus when he uses physical metaphors that involve touching and embracing and loving the One (VI 9, 10, 14–17; IV 8, 1, 1–11; Rist, 1967, 50–1).

2.6 *The Transfiguration of Man*

According to Andrew Smith, “although the One is the ultimate principle and source of all, Intellect stands at the very core of Plotinus’ metaphysics” (Smith 2004: 27). Why? It is because the only language that we can use to speak is situated within the intelligible world. However, for Plotinus, the highest part of Intellect may actually closely touch the One and it is this realm that the wise man reaches when he reaches the One. That is why Plotinus uses so many

physical metaphors about “loving” and “touching.” The wise man, then, improves himself through virtue and, as a result of his exertions, he gains beauty (v 5, 8, 10–14) in a kind of transfiguration. Thus, as the virtues grow within the wise man and, in beauty, he begins to reach the One, then the wise man rises higher and higher to the point where the Intellect literally touches the One. There, to use Plotinus’s words, the wise man is “resting in the divine.” While resting in a place where, accepting phenomenal and subjective properties in all their bounty, one accepts also that that which is not describable in language or measurable in number may also have a reality. Thus, by developing virtues, we can come to identify with, and thereby come to love and touch this place so that we can thereby come to dwell in the divine, that is, dwell in the One.

Florensky links the process of purification with loving and beauty, then man’s process of purification and “likening to God” is coming closer to beauty (Florensky 1997: 62). “Light is the Truth, and this Truth unfailingly manifests itself” (65). Florensky relates this light to the Christian transfiguration, to the “light of Tabor” (70) adding that St. Basil the Great uses Plotinus to link beauty and light (72), and the purified person gains light and beauty (73–4). Echoing Plotinus, Frank refers to values as the true path to the One and he writes about touching spiritual realities that surpass him. In this, he serves good, beauty or God (Frank 1983: 169).

For Tarkovsky, “touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that call for truth which prompted the artist to his creative act” (Tarkovsky 1986: 43). This is why, for Tarkovsky, his films are “about one thing: the extreme manifestation of faith” which is seeking to draw closer to the ideal, which is infinity (Schreck 2001: 13–14). The transfiguration, when it occurs in a Tarkovsky’s film, is an intense moment when the screen literally shines, not necessarily with light, but with a kind of filmic intensity, when his images spill over into the viewer’s consciousness, inhabiting a space that can often last for the rest of a viewer’s life. I am thinking here, for example, about the final scene in *Stalker* when Monkey moves glasses across the table, or the scene in *Nostalgia*, when Gorchakov is crossing St. Catherine’s Pool carrying a small stub of a lighted candle or the frantic antics of Alexander as he blunders about before his burning house like an exaggerated, and somewhat ridiculous, holy fool. These and other scenes aspire to filmic transfiguration.

3 Traces of the One in Tarkovsky’s Films

In many of his filmic images, Tarkovsky has the aspiration of reaching the Divine or the One. In this, Tarkovsky sees himself as God’s co-worker and he sees

his creative acts as a prayer or a miracle. Art, he believes, prepares us for something higher and the artistic image is then a detector of the absolute. Thus, Tarkovsky's filmic images are traces of the One which allow the viewer to aspire and to attain the One. But his images can also be disconcerting, because they use improper speech and antinomian thinking, and yet they also have a tangibility or a near physical connection with something other. Tarkovsky's highest filmic aspiration is to achieve transfiguration in his films, that is, create images that literally shine with a kind of filmic intensity. The philosophical ideas that underlie these aspirations are derived from Plotinus's philosophy of the One, especially as this thought is filtered through the philosophies of Florensky and Frank. The strongest evidence for this in Tarkovsky's water collages. In his water collages Tarkovsky shows physical objects, often objects of decay, but they are by no means portrayed realistically. Tarkovsky comes to the water collage from two directions: from the direction of collage and from the direction of water. By the time of *Stalker*, Tarkovsky has combined these two into a single distinct artistic form, but during his first four films they often remained separated. However, there is an inkling of the direction he would take in the ending to his film *Andrei Rublyov*, when water is shown being poured over one of Rublyov's icons.

Regarding collage, Tarkovsky uses collage film techniques in *Ivan's Childhood* and *Mirror*. He also places objects, particularly iconic cultural and art objects, in strategic positions throughout all his films. As an example, in the library in *Solaris* Tarkovsky assembles a vast collection of death masks, etchings, busts, and butterflies, a chandelier, stained glass, Brueghel reproductions, the Venus de Milo, a leather-bound volume of Don Quixote, a grotesque mask, a trumpet, some guns, a number of candelabras, a mirror and much more. These are placed strategically about the library with, seemingly, great care.

Regarding water, Tarkovsky seems to literally douse his films in water. He explains that, "Water is a mysterious element, a single molecule of which is very photogenic. It can convey movement and a sense of change and flux. (...) Maybe it has subconscious echoes—perhaps my love of water arises from some atavistic memory of some ancestral transmigration" (Mitchell 2006: 75). Tonino Guerra describes Tarkovsky's fixation with water in a filmed interview:

I will never forget the story he told me of the day he spent in his country house. It was raining and the water soaked the inside of the wooden veranda. He was tempted to close the windows, but the water fascinated him as it gathered to make a small well, just under the window and then stretched out in a stream which widened into a wet stain at his feet, while he was seated at the end of the room, near the wall. The dog which

passed, going from one room to another, wet his feet and shook them in order to dry out quickly. A half an hour later the sun beat down on the house and its rays shone into the veranda, slowly drying out the wet stain, which little by little disappeared before his eyes. Then he saw the dog pass again, no longer shaking his feet. So Tarkovsky was fascinated by this small phenomenon; the birth and death of a humid stain.

GUERRA 1983: npn

Tarkovsky's most explicit use of the water collage is in the film *Stalker* in the scene often called "the Stalker's dream." I think it is important to describe this scene at length in order to illustrate that the pace of Tarkovsky's panning shot is used to effect a growing sense of closeness with the physical objects that are portrayed. Here, in this scene, the water collage is made of found objects taken from the detritus of modern civilization and also from iconic art objects. These are then meticulously combined under water. As the camera slowly pans across the material, there is a voice-over.

The scene opens with Stalker lying on his arm with wide open eyes, open mouth and the fingers of his right hand stretched outwards on the ground. He is lying on top of some bright green moss. A female voice reads from the Book of Revelations. The scene is initially in color, then cuts to sepia. Stalker is now asleep. The camera moves up his face, then past his head. To the right, now, there is water. To the left of the frame there seems to be a black silken sheet that is flowing swiftly past. The sheet moves away to the left and reveals water, stones, and mosses. Most of the stones are under water, but sometimes they rise up out of it. When they do they are covered with a very dark moss, probably the green moss that the Stalker was lying on, but here, in sepia, it looks black. An old syringe appears as the camera pans upwards, then the syringe passes away. Something black floats on the water, dust or moss. A mirror appears showing some sky and then two trees. The edges of the mirror are covered in dust or soil. The trees form into a landscape, portrayed upside down. It is a kind of pastoral scene, like from a painting. Is it a landscape painting and not a mirror? The slow pan of the camera speeds up. Some roots appear and then another mirror, on top of which there is a bowl. In the bowl, there are six fish swimming about. At this precise point the voice-over, quoting from the Book of Revelations, ends with a low laugh and Eduard Artemyev's haunting Stalker theme-music drifts in. A large stone appears, behind which there is another syringe. The camera moves further upwards into a tray that contains coins and two further syringes, all of which are covered in dust. Then, above the tray, which has coins resting on its edges, there is an image of St. John the Baptist taken from van Eyck's Ghent altarpiece. Above this, there is a piece of

metal that looks like part of a machine. There is a rag floating over it and some white board to the side. An old rusted gun appears lying on this board. The board, in fact, turns out to be white tiles. A black tile appears among the white ones, forming a mosaic shape in the tiling. The internal mechanisms of a lock show. They are old and dusty. A large spring appears next, then a kind of bag inside of which there may be gemstones. This is to the left of the spring. There is some moss on the other side. A piece of newspaper appears with the date the 28th December on it. This just happens to be the date that Andrei Tarkovsky later died, in 1986. A wooden box appears, a box that looks like a shoeshine box. Then more tiles, with dust floating on them. Some scraps of debris show but it is difficult to make out what they are. Then there is just dust on tiles. A large piece of rusted metal appears that looks like another piece of machinery. More tiles and dust, then stones and a large amount of caked dust. At this point, the camera rises to show the Stalker's hand, which is resting in water. The camera stops and changes direction. It hovers slightly backwards, rises upwards and moves slightly back revealing more of the Stalker's hand. Then the film cuts to a black dog, sitting on a concrete bank beside an overgrown stream. The dog stands up and the camera cuts to the waking Stalker.

The water collage seems to gather civilization's shards into a watery amalgam that Tarkovsky's camera slowly pans over. Then it is as if he is nonchalantly playing with these cultural artefacts and discarded fragments, visually tipping them over in a kind of emotionless way, like the way the Stalker tips over the Writer's gun at the end of the tunnel. Here these fragments are displayed for texture, for beauty or for their dreamlike qualities rather than for their utility. They are a form of decoration for the water, which has become a kind of curtain behind which the truth of these objects has been hidden. The water might be a place, to use the words quoted from Heraclitus in Tarkovsky's diaries, "we enter, and do not enter twice, the same stream" (Tarkovsky 1989: 287). The earth, water and objects (especially old and decaying objects) occur all the time in Tarkovsky's films, often mixed with disconcerting subliminal sounds and refer to the ineffable and to the nebulous very much like words and images act in Plotinus when the latter is referring to the One (Truppin 1992: 235–248).³

3 When we look into the darkness of matter, what do we see? For Plotinus, we see "a reflection of intelligibles upon matter (V.1.9.20–34)" (Stamatellos 2007: 136). Plotinus portrays this as the Mirror of Dionysus (IV.3.12), where the perceptible bodies are "images drawn on shadows" (VI.3.8.35–6). Then, like in the curtain of Heraclitus's stream "the 'form' slips away on the alien mirror of 'matter' like an echo from smooth flat surfaces" (III.6.14.25)" (Stamatellos, 2007: 136).

Conclusion

In his films, Tarkovsky uses images of physical traces of the One, traces in the lower hypostases, in order to show us that we can ourselves aspire to reach the One. But in Tarkovsky's case, under the direct influence of Florensky and Frank, the One is equated with the Christian God of the Russian Orthodox tradition. But if we understand this, that Tarkovsky is all the time referring to the Orthodox Christian God and not directly to the One of Plotinus, then we can use Tarkovsky's filmic images as if they are a form of "improper speech," a filmic version of the words that Plotinus uses inside his texts. Then, hidden in the depths of Tarkovsky's films, in these works of art, we can begin to find a universe conceived in Plotinian terms. Tarkovsky, in his films and also in his writings and interviews, is asking us to aspire to attain the Divine. In this process, and this I believe is the supreme artistic aspiration of Tarkovsky, the universe itself becomes a work of art that we can perceive in a film. That is, the universe conceived in Plotinian, and also in Russian Orthodox terms, becomes for Tarkovsky a miracle, it becomes the spoken words of God and ultimately it becomes transfiguration in film.

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Heracles, Hylas, and the Uses of Reflection

Stephen R.L. Clark

1 Hylas and the Nymphs

Acquaintance, even conversation, with reflections is not now what once it was. What was once only imagined is now aggressively present: moving images from fantasy and memory besiege us. Two thousand years ago and more mirrors were bowls of water, or else polished obsidian and silver.¹ Our ancestors mostly looked *down* into them (that is why a mirror is *katoptron*²), and might imagine themselves pulled down into the watery realm, literally *nympholeptoi*, nymph-caught, frenzied, besotted, like Heracles' ward Hylas, who was pulled into the water by nymphs, and left only an echo for Heracles as he tried to find his ward.³ Or, like Aesop's dog, might be misled by the sight of a supposedly *other* dog with *another* and *better* bone (*Complete Fables*, 137). The story that we now more commonly remember concerns the sad fate of Narcissus, who was punished for despising the nymph Echo by being trapped in admiration of his own reflection in a pool (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.339–510). And according to the *Hermetic Corpus* the eternal Mind sees its own image reflected in the Earth, and falls in love and so into the material world (*Poimandres* 1.14; Copenhagen 1992: 3). But this was not because they knowingly admired *themselves*. Narcissus was not a narcissist! The story is told that the Apostle John, in his old age, failed to recognize the portrait of himself that a disciple had had an artist paint: he had never had reason or opportunity to notice what he looked like.⁴ No doubt less saintly persons had at least some idea, silvered or sparkling, of their own features. But even those who might catch sight of themselves in

1 Ayfre (2004: 87) acknowledges the point about ancient mirrors, “with a tain that is always a little fluid” (cited by Cooper 2013: 80).

2 Plato, *Cratylus* 414c suggests that “*katoptron*” has an intrusive *rho*: the word should be *katop-ton*, with its suggestion that we look *downwards* into the reflective surface.

3 See Plotinus, *Ennead* I 6 [1], 8, 9: we might thereby sink down into Hades and consort with shadows; see also III 6 [26]. 7, 41–2 on “falling into falsity, like things in a dream or water or a mirror.” All quotations from Plotinus are drawn from Armstrong 1966–88. On Hylas see Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.1172–1272; Theocritus, *Idyll* 13; Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.41–2; Propertius, *Elegies* 1.20.

4 *Acts of John* 26–9 (2nd century). See Tsakiridou 2013: 210–211; Iozzia 2015: 3–9.

some larger reflective surface, might not be able to see much: so in the temple of Despoina in Arcadia, Pausanias tells us,

On the right as you go out of the temple there is a mirror fitted into the wall. If anyone looks into this mirror, he will see himself very dimly indeed or not at all, but the actual images of the gods and the throne can be seen quite clearly.⁵

There were also hand-held mirrors, or pretty boxes lined with silver pieces, but these would show very little even of the observer's face—and certainly not, of course, the flickering eyes that we notice in others' faces. "Even more than this—drinking-cups are now made in such a manner, as to be filled inside with numerous concave facets, like so many mirrors; so that if but one person looks into the interior, he sees reflected a whole multitude of persons" (Pliny, *Natural History* vol. 9, 95). Heron of Alexandria is credited with the invention of "*polytheon*" mirrors, reflecting the same image multiple times—a device, so Seneca says, that a rich Roman, Hostius Quadra, employed to allow himself multiple images of his various copulations.⁶ What lies in the reflective surface, even if it is *our* reflection, is mysteriously different from the usual, and so also are the reflections of the "real things" that stand behind us. Even when it is our own image that we wish to inspect, there are other things to see: those who seek to follow the Delphic instruction to "know yourself"⁷—so St. Hesychios of Sinai (8th century?) was to say—find themselves, as it were, gazing into a mirror and sighting the dark faces of the demons peering over their shoulders.⁸

The same is true of the shadows cast on the walls of Plato's cave—not shadows of the prisoners chained in place but of the puppet show going on behind their backs:⁹ shadows and reflections are alike the effects of something else unseen, though shadows are dark and reflections brighter than their surrounds. We cannot *touch* either, but can be absorbed, distracted, nympholept.

5 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 8.37.7–8, cited by Addey 2007: 36.

6 Seneca *Naturales Quaestiones* 1.16.3–5, discussed by Bartsch 2006: 103–114.

7 See Plotinus *Ennead* VI 7 [38]. 41, 22f: the injunction is "said to those who because of their selves' multiplicity have the business of counting themselves up and learning that they do not know all of the number and kind of things they are."

8 Hesychios, "On Watchfulness and Holiness" §23; Palmer et al 1979: 228.

9 Plato *Republic* 7.514a–517b. This is probably the best known of Plato's myths, and most often mentioned in discussing modern cinema. The point of his story is two-fold: first, that the prisoners or captive audience do not see the real causes of what is happening before them; second, that they are not likely to be persuaded of the truth by anyone who comes back into the cave in the hope of enlightening them.

Or perhaps—and this is a point to which I shall return—we can notice the shadows cast by the puppeteers themselves, the demons, and begin the process of detachment.

More modern technology allows us a wider range of metaphors. What we see in mirrors or pools of water are literal reflections of our more usual surroundings. Photography allows us to see unreversed images that are, in that respect, a little more like what we think we see directly (though the verisimilitude of photographs should not be exaggerated), and the images remain even when what they reflect has gone.¹⁰ Cinema has a still more independent life. In fact it may often be true that there never were exactly the realities whose cinematic images we see: films are cut and pasted to produce a plausible continuity of action; apparent interactions, apparent background settings, may be wholly fictional. The actors themselves may not know what they are portrayed as being and doing till they see the completed film. Actually, this is not altogether novel. It is likely—as later artists have testified—that Pheidias and Praxiteles borrowed different body parts from different models, and “air-brushed” the scars of individual life. “Underneath such descriptions is an idea of a singular, universal body, an idealized composite of the ‘best’ features of real bodies” (Barcan 2004: 34). Note that Truman—whose story I shall address a little later—pieces together a picture of his idealized love from fragmented pictures. The temptation to believe that such constructs remind us of reality may be all the stronger just because they are not simple reflections. At least we more easily suspend our disbelief as we are told stories of film fans being drawn into the film,¹¹ participating “for real” in the fantasized events.

Those stories may be intentionally ambiguous: are we to suppose that the fans are trapped, like Hylas, and divorced forever from their proper place and friendships? Or—sometimes—rescued, like Dorothy from the Land of Oz? Or is the film world truly a *better* world, even if its existence is a function of the imagination? On the one hand Pleasantville is transformed by the presence of teenagers with a more “modern” sensibility. On the other hand, one of those same

10 Cf. Plotinus *Ennead* VI 4 [22], 10; VI 5 [23], 8, 17; III 6 [26], 7, 25; III 6 [26], 13, 35; IV 5 [29], 7, 44; VI 2 [43], 22, 34. Cf. Plato *Timaeus* 50c4–5.

11 See, for example, *Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen 1985), *Stay Tuned* (Peter Hyams 1992), *Last Action Hero* (John McTiernan 1993), *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross 1998). Even mirrors of course can be perceived as gateways into another realm (as they were for Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*), and one that is like the fabled land of the dead, all values subtly reversed. Hillman (1979: 39) mentions an Egyptian fable that digestion too is reversed in the Underworld, so that excrement leaves through the mouths of the antipodean dead—a story making clear the parallel between Plato’s reversed world (*Statesman* 269d9ff) and the Antipodes, and the unvoiced implications of *his* fable.

teenagers (Jennifer/Mary Sue) apparently prefers to stay within that dream. The “real” world here presented—itself of course a part of a film reality—is less open to revision and reform: we can’t change the world of our own experience merely by *wanting* it to be different.

We may be pulled in to the imaginary world, for better or for worse. And the inmates of that imaginary world may break out into our consensus reality—again, for better or for worse (as Jack Slater and Mr. Benedict, from *The Last Action Hero*). The story that pagan Neoplatonists told is that this is our actual history and situation. We have *already* been pulled down into an unreal world, and need to clamber back again to truth. But perhaps there is already a real difference between that story and the more modern version: in the older story we grew tired of “being together” and so each preferred to descend into a world we could each call “our own.” We begin our laborious ascent again when we begin to see that there are realities outwith our personal *sensa*, that there are real beings and a real world not dependent on our own perceptions, feelings and imaginings. But films—considered as an image of a subordinate reality—are offered, exactly, as *shared* dreams. At its simplest the film (and similar entertainments) give us a common stock of stories, pictures, charms and countercharms suitable for a mass of people with little *personal* in common. Our remote ancestors lived in relatively small tribes, bonded by gossip and familiar stories, often embedded in the landscape they inhabited. Writing enabled larger groups to form and prosper, retaining a common history about days and lands far off. Film brings all these imaginings firmly before us, in ways much less amenable to private, parochial rewrites: we can speculate harmlessly about the motives and back stories of imaginary characters, now that we mostly do not live alongside our cousins or share familiar faces. Soap operas, “reality TV,” sagas such as *Buffy*, *Harry Potter* or *X-Men*, and gossip about “stars”—or the Royal Family—link us together—in a way.

So the moral is now somewhat different from the older: nowadays we might prefer to notice that our Fall is not simply a fall into a private realm—as Heraclitus suggested, “the waking share one common world, whereas the sleeping turn aside each man into a world of his own.”¹² We suspect instead that the sleeping turn into *another* “common” world, manufactured for us from familiar dreams. “At last, for the first time, by means of the machine, in their own likeness, our dreams are projected and objectified. They are industrially fabricated, collectively shared,” writes Edgar Morin (2005: 218). Would that please Platonists? Presumably not entirely. Even if the stories are not overtly wicked—encouraging bad behavior and bad attitudes in all those who admire

12 Heracleitos 22B89DK: cited by Hillman 1979: 133.

their heroes—they can only represent the most superficial of realities: how heroes *look* or are supposed to look; how scientists or sages *seem* to reason (wild guesses, jargon, bad temper and a lot of hand-waving), rather than actual hard logical or experimental effort. The stories may divert or amuse—but (exactly) they do *divert* us from a proper engagement with reality. They divert us, that is, from our moral and intellectual duties in the world we mostly think is real. And—at least for Platonists—they also mimic our original diversion, Fall, into the world of current experience. Reflections and shadows mostly stand for the temptations of sense, pulling us into the world as we plot it for ourselves, full of stereotypes, centered on our individual selves, flattering self-images or tribal loyalties. The reflections are of real things, and maybe real puppeteers, manipulating us from behind: we need somehow to turn around and see.

One of the most overtly Gnostic of recent films, *The Truman Show*, imagines how a victim of the unscrupulous Demiurge, confined to his little island by fear, mistaken love and ignorance, may slowly realize that those he thought were friends are actually his jailers, that the world of his experience makes no sense, and that there are some clues as to how he might break free. His audience—as represented in the film—may cheer at his eventual escape, but are themselves as besotted with the fiction as before: they too are captives in an artificial world, numb to their own realities—and perhaps (for once the possibility that we are massively deceived is aired it tends to fester) themselves in need of a great awakening. Even if we are not so badly deceived as Truman, maybe we are all deceived together—as we can imagine the inmates of *The Matrix* are. How shall we tell Reality, and do we need to bother?

2 **Animated Images**

The fables I have been mentioning—of spectators drawn into the fictional world of films or fictional agents emerging from the film-world into our realities—may be interpreted allegorically, as stories about our real Fall into the material world from the higher noetic realm. They are also (and more easily for those with other metaphysical assumptions) be interpreted *morally*, reminders that we should ourselves abandon all the fictions and come back to everyday existence—rather as Odysseus must leave fairyland behind, and the offer of immortality, to return to wife, family, household, kingdom. Dorothy must return to Kansas. We have to leave the cinema—and this may be the primary inspiration of these films, composed self-reflectively by the film-makers in philosophical mode. That common moral can be improved: by watching the stereotypes and fantasies that too often govern us laid out on the screen we may

come to recognize their effects in “real life” and begin to feel our independence from them. Once we have *seen* the devils that stand behind us, or at least their images, we may find courage and sense enough to ignore or overthrow them. The world as we ordinarily experience it is ruled by unvoiced assumptions, foolish hopes and fears, stereotypical judgments about this and that. Waking up to the “*real* world” may not, after all, be merely a return to common sense. Like Markandeya in the Hindu story we may fall out of the sleeping Vishnu’s mouth—as it were from the maw of the multiplex—into “the immense silence of the night of Brahma” to discover truth!¹³

Can our imagination help us in this enterprise? Plotinus does not only speak of shadows and reflections but of inner statues, real presences barnacled by time and needing hard work to repair and scrub them clean. Reflections may suck us down, but statues, it appears, may help us rise. Just so, on the one hand he was himself opposed to having his portrait painted, as it focused attention on the least significant of his properties.¹⁴ On the other hand, he accepted the familiar trope that Pheidias’ Olympian Zeus looked just the way Zeus *would* look if he chose to be incarnate.¹⁵ Or so people had thought since Pheidias made his mark:

In times past, because we had no clear knowledge, we formed each his different idea, and each person, according to his capacity and nature, conceived a likeness for every divine manifestation and fashioned such likenesses in his dreams; and if we do perchance collect any small and insignificant likenesses made by the earlier artists, we do not trust them very much nor pay them very much attention. But [Pheidias] by the power of [his] art first conquered and united Hellas and then all others by means of this wondrous presentment, showing forth so marvelous and dazzling a conception, that none of those who have beheld it could any longer easily form a different one.¹⁶

“The wise men of old ... made temples and statues in the wish that the gods should be present to them” (*Ennead* IV 3, 27, 11): the temples and statues that

13 Zimmer 1946: 38–39; see also Doniger O’Flaherty 1984: 111: “the vision of reality may be the only true sanity, but it *feels* like madness”!

14 *Life* 1.5–20: Amelius apparently had a portrait drawn in secret by the painter Carterius, presumably to help his own imagination of the greater soul. Porphyry, it is implied, understood better than Amelius that it was Plotinus’ *spirit*, not his bodily appearance that deserved remembrance: see Edwards 1993.

15 *Ennead* V 8 [31], 1, 39–41. See Rich 1960.

16 Dio Chrysostom, “Man’s First Conception of God”: *Discourses* vol. 2, 59 (12.53).

they made were richly imagined ones, whether they were entirely “within their minds” or placed out in the world for all to see—as the *Hermetic Corpus* suggests (see *Asclepius* 24; Copenhaver 1992: 81). Quite what those latter animated statues were remains obscure.¹⁷ It is possible that they were powered by whatever technical trick to deceive or amuse the faithful (as is normally the case in science fiction). Maybe the Emperor Julian’s favored teacher, Maximus, that “theatrical wonder-worker,” really *did* make a statue of Hecate laugh and the torches in her hands to light up.¹⁸ Maybe flickering candlelight gave the impression that the decorated surfaces of the statue moved, so enabling the viewers “to experience the *eikon* as being the archangel before [them]: an *empsychos graphē*” (Pentcheva 2010: 184). Maybe Iamblichus was right to insist that “the divine images occur not only within the imagination of an inspired devotee, but may be apparent also to the observers of ritual.”¹⁹ Or else they were only subjectively *perceived* to be moving, as devout Hindus or Catholics may also see their statues’ giving signs of life—and insofar as the supposedly physical world is a composite or idealization of common perceptions, why should we be surprised that some can see what others don’t, any more than we are surprised that some of us cannot distinguish red and green? We may at first find it easier to suppose that they were only privately *imagined* images—and this does indeed fit better with Plotinus’s own use of them, when he insists that we must scrub and polish our *internal* statues. Modern technology enables us to make the metaphor visible—and will do so the more successfully as we move into full hologrammatic entertainment,²⁰ whether in a virtual cyberspace or in live role-playing games assisted by clever robots—*Tron* or *Westworld*! I remark in passing that the more we expect such artforms to be created the more we may suspect that we are already, literally, living in such a dream—a wholly artificial world devised by Gamers for whatever purpose of entertainment, education or control (see Bostrom 2003).

But consider first how the moving statues of our imagination are probably intended by Plotinus and his fellows, as well as reflected even in modern film. Is it odd to think that such imaginings might embody real spirits? Possibly not—as any art object, even a static one, must in a way be animated. Nilus the

17 See Johnston 2008; Uzdaviny 2009.

18 Eunapius, *Lives*, 435. See further Uzdaviny 2010: 143–203.

19 Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 3.8.117, 1–3, cited by Clarke 2001: 100.

20 More is already involved in the shared hallucination, so to speak, of the cinema than merely cameras and projectors, as is observed by Baudry 1986. The newer technologies will be even more like guided dreams (and some films, self-referentially, already trade on this plotline: e.g. *Inception* (Nolan 2010)).

Scholastic puts words into the mouth of a sculpture: “I laugh because I marvel how, put together out of all sorts of stones, I suddenly become a satyr.”²¹ When what is intended is more than a fantasy, the matter becomes more serious still. Nilus again: “How daring it is to picture the incorporeal! But yet the image leads us up to spiritual recollection of celestial beings.”²²

Greatly daring was the wax that formed the image of the invisible Prince of the Angels, incorporeal in the essence of his form. But yet it is not without grace; for a man looking at the image directs his mind to a higher contemplation. No longer has he a confused veneration, but imprinting the image in himself he fears him as if he were present. The eyes stir up the depths of the spirit, and Art can convey by colors the prayers of the soul.²³

What is represented in such images, what makes them distinct images, are the presences we most revere and fear. As a cultured Hellene, Plotinus would be expected to think of these images—virtues or the powers that lie behind such virtues—in human form: non-humans usually represent the lesser powers of the soul which need to be controlled or extirpated.²⁴ We may also suspect that the images are female—as most contemporary statues or pictures of the virtues were female (Stafford 2000: 27–35). But as an Egyptian Plotinus may have been ready to use the same techniques as “the wise men of old,” who symbolized the character and properties of their gods by adding animal heads or bodies. As an Alexandrian he may also have been as well acquainted as Numenius with the Hebrew tradition.²⁵ The sphere “all faces, shining with living faces” (VI 7 [38] 15, 25) to which he likened the cosmos may have been inspired by *Merkabah* mysticism, resting on Ezekiel’s vision:

21 Nilus the Scholastic (5th century), *Planudean Appendix* (*Greek Anthology* bk.16), epigram 247, quoted by Mathew 1963: 76.

22 Nilus “On an image of the archangel”: Paton, *Greek Anthology* 1.34, 1.33: quoted by Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, p. 117.

23 Agathias (536–82), Paton, *Greek Anthology*, 1.34, quoted by Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, p. 78.

24 A similarly unthinking anthropomorphism is displayed in Wittgenstein’s aphorism: “The human body is the best picture of the human soul” (Wittgenstein 2009: 366 [iv. 25]). Even Plato did not altogether agree with that—see *Phaedrus* 246–8 on the soul as composed of horses, charioteer and chariot.

25 Numenius of Apamea described Plato as Moses in Attic garb. Plotinus was accused of plagiarizing him. See Dodds 1960.

On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was on him there. As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; such were their faces.

EZEKIEL 1.2–11

We are fortunate to live in a time when this vision could be represented in the cinema (though the *Merkabah* mystics would certainly advise against the experiment)! The difference between the Hebraic and the Hellenic vision here is profound, and profoundly significant—but that is another story.

In Plotinus' day—leaving aside automata—his chief reliance had to be on “pantomime,” as his contemporaries understood that form. “Pantomimes” were professional dancers, equipped to put characters and emotions on display by *phorai*, *schemata* and *deixeis* (that is, movements, poses and gestures).²⁶ Their reputation amongst respectable Romans—and some philosophers—was not good. After all, by taking on the overt characters of the madman, fool or woman, they were at odds with Plato's warning against actors' portrayal of characters one ought *not* to imitate.²⁷

And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything, comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow

26 Plutarch, “Table Talk” 9.747bc: *Moralia* vol. 9, 289–291; see Webb 2009: 74.

27 Plato *Republic* 10.605; see also *Ion* 541e; *Euthydemus* 288b.

them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city.

PLATO, *Republic* 3.398ab

And the imitations might, in a sense, be all too real.

Demons (...) are said to dance because dance is a constantly changing movement of the limbs. As the dancers come on stage with different masks (or characters) at different times, so demons, *using us like masks*, sometimes dance [the role of] the angry man, sometimes [the role of] the man full of desire and obsessed with the joys of the flesh, sometimes the liar. And this is what happens to us as we receive within ourselves the multifarious workings of demons and bend our hearts and our limbs in accordance with their will.²⁸

Ezekiel too, I should acknowledge, saw in a vision how the elders of Israel, each in the imagined privacy of their hearts, were secretly worshipping “monstrous abominations:” reptiles, beasts and vermin, and the sun itself (*Ezekiel* 8.6–18). But not everyone agreed that the dancers served abominations, even if they sometimes portrayed them.

It is [the pantomime’s] profession to show forth human character and passion in all their variety; to depict love and anger, frenzy and grief, each in its due measure. Wondrous art!—on the same day, he is mad Athamas and shrinking Ino; he is Atreus, and again he is Thyestes, and next Aegisthus or Aerope; all one man’s work.²⁹

This is an art that needs more science than Plato ever imagined, and may be concerned to comprehend and *control*, not merely to *exhibit* demons. According to Lucian of Samosata it required

the highest standard of culture in all its branches, and involving a knowledge not of music only, but of rhythm and meter, and above all of your beloved philosophy, both natural and moral, the subtleties of dialectic alone being rejected as serving no useful purpose. Rhetoric, too, in so far

28 Ps-Basil of Caesarea (4th century AD), *Commentary on Isaiah* 13.276, cited by Webb 2009: 163–164 (my italics).

29 Lucian “On Pantomime” 1905: 2.258 (see <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl2/wl219.htm>, accessed 12/11/2015)).

as that art is concerned with the exposition of human character and human passions, claims a share of its attention. Nor can it dispense with the painter's and the sculptor's arts; in its close observance of the harmonious proportions that these teach, it is the equal of an Apelles or a Phidias. But above all Mnemosyne [Memory], and her daughter Polyhymnia [the Muse of Dance], must be propitiated by an art that would remember all things. Like Calchas in Homer, the pantomime must know all "that is, that was, that shall be;" nothing must escape his ever ready memory. Faithfully to represent his subject, adequately to express his own conceptions, to make plain all that might be obscure;—these are the first essentials for the pantomime, to whom no higher compliment could be paid than Thucydides's tribute to Pericles, who, he says, "could not only conceive a wise policy, but render it intelligible to his hearers;" the intelligibility, in the present case, depending on clearness of gesticulation. For his materials, he must draw continually, as I have said, upon his unfailing memory of ancient story; and memory must be backed by taste and judgement. He must know the history of the world, from the time when it first emerged from Chaos down to the days of Egyptian Cleopatra.³⁰

Pantomimes, in brief, were supposed—by their supporters at least—to provide a route to understanding of the sort that more usual philosophers also professed: one relying on learning and practice rather than direct inspiration.

Lesbonax of Mytilene [a first century rhetorician] called pantomimes "manual philosophers," and used to frequent the theatre, in the conviction that he came out of it a better man than he went in. And Timocrates, his teacher, after accidentally witnessing a pantomimic performance, exclaimed: "How much have I lost by my scrupulous devotion to philosophy!" I know not what truth there may be in Plato's analysis of the soul into the three elements of spirit, appetite, and reason: but each of the three is admirably illustrated by the pantomime; he shows us the angry man, he shows us the lover, and he shows us every passion under the control of reason; this last—like touch among the senses—is all-pervading. Again, in his care for beauty and grace of movement, have we not an illustration of the Aristotelian principle, which makes beauty a third part

30 Lucian, "On Pantomime" 1905: 2.251. See Mulhall 2007 and Mulhall 2016: 85–103 for a persuasive argument that the creators of film may themselves be philosophers, working through—on film—the problems of representation and embodiment intrinsic to their craft (and life).

of Good? Nay, I once heard someone hazard a remark, to the effect that the philosophy of Pantomime went still further, and that in the *silence* of the characters a Pythagorean doctrine was shadowed forth.

LUCIAN 1905: 258–259

Could Plotinus have agreed? Apparently so, since “the activity of life is an artistic activity, like the way in which one who is dancing is moving; for the dancer himself is like the life which is artistic in this way and his art moves him.”³¹ The dancer, in the Classical Mediterranean as well as in Hindu India, sought to embody spirits, but also to keep them under an overriding control. According to Libanius, “the dancer does not imitate (*mimēomai*) but makes present (*paristemi*) in himself the divinities he plays.”³²

Animated statues and pantomimic dancers get our attention, and thereby evoke the spirits or the gods that they embody. Without soul, as Plotinus said, there is only an unmeaning, undifferentiated darkness (V 1 [10].2, 1, 13–23, 26–28). To *identify*, not merely to internalize: unless they were already present in us we should never see them in the seemingly outer world. One presence in particular, *pace* Ezekiel, lies at the center of the Plotinian imagination:

One must not chase after it, but wait quietly till it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it, as the eye awaits the rising of the sun; and the sun rising over the horizon (“from Ocean,” the poets say) gives itself to the eyes to see. But from where will he of whom the sun is an image rise? What is the horizon which he will mount above when he appears? (V 5 [32].8, 3–8).

Plotinus is not unusual in thus honoring the Sun as the primary sign and symbol of the first origin of all things. The Sun was widely worshipped (or at least honored), by Essenes, by Apollonius of Tyana, and the Emperor Vespasian (Stoneman 1992: 145–146). The cult of Sol Invictus, absorbing Elagabal of Emesa as well as Sol Indigenes of Rome, was publicized under the emperor Aurelian (270–75 AD), after Plotinus’s death, in an effort to find a focus for imperial dreams—the figure of the Emperor himself having plainly failed to secure an abiding loyalty (Halsberghe 1972: 132, 135–175). Julian, rejecting Constantine’s appeal to the Christian churches for a similar end, attempted to reinvent a

31 *Ennead* III 2 [47], 16, 23–7; see also VI 1 [10], 27, 20, where a more active Matter than usual, capable of becoming everything, is “like the dancer who in his dance makes himself everything.”

32 Libanius, “Reply to Aristides on Behalf of the Dancers” [*Orations* 64], 116: Webb 2009: 77.

solar paganism,³³ and some solar rhetoric and celebrations were absorbed in Christian ritual and rhetoric: “thine be the glory, risen, conquering Sun (or Son).”

We must bring that imagined sun within us—or realize that it is already there:

Were not the eye itself a sun,
No sun for it could ever shine:
By nothing godlike could the heart be won,
Were not the heart itself divine.³⁴

“Can we desire or recognize something of which we are *entirely* incapable?” (Williams 1961: 5) But even that image must at last be stripped away and we move past the images of the outer sanctuary (VI 9 [9], 11). We need at last to abandon even these high images, of heroes, virtues, stars. John Chrysostom was alert to the dangers, specifically of “the image (*eidolon*) of the mime actress and its effect on the male soul”:

Even when the show is over and she has gone away, the image of her is stored up in your soul, her words, her gestures, her glances, the way she walks, the rhythm, the enunciation, the lewd songs.³⁵

She serves, in short, as a nymph of the destructive sort! But even more respectable images may have their dangers, encouraging us to make ourselves the heroes of our own pleasant story.

In reference to icons, we should be confident that every work made in the name of God is good and holy. But stay away from idols and statues. For these as well as their makers are evil and portentous. An icon of a holy prophet is one thing, a statue or a small figure of Cronos, Aphrodite, the Sun or the Moon is another.³⁶

Free-standing statues in general are suspect, but even icons may be corruptly viewed. In the Russian Orthodox tradition the fault is “*prelest*,” the spiritual pride that mistakes our gravest faults, suitably enhanced and decorated, for virtues (see Florensky 1996: 47–49).

33 Julian, *Oratio 4: Hymn to Helios: Works*, vol. 1, 353–442; see Smith 1995: 139–162.

34 Goethe in *Minor Poems*, after *Ennead* I 6 [1], 9, 30–2; cf. Plato, *Republic* 6.508b3–509a1.

35 John Chrysostom, *De Davide et Saule* 3, PG 54.697; Webb 2009: 179.

36 John of Damascus *Orationes de imaginibus tres* 3.73, quoted by Papaioannou 2013: 180.

But perhaps Plotinus has an answer. Those faults themselves *were* virtues, once.

When [the soul] is there [that is, in the intelligible realm] [she] has the heavenly love, but here love becomes vulgar; for the soul there is the heavenly Aphrodite, but here becomes the vulgar Aphrodite, a kind of whore. And every soul is Aphrodite. (...) The soul then in her natural state is in love with God and wants to be united with him; it is like the noble love of a girl for her noble father (VI 9 [9], 28ff).

The more usual archetype of that particular filial love is the virginal Athena (or still more alarmingly, Electra!): by invoking Aphrodite (and by implication rewriting the background story) Plotinus may be emphasizing his recurrent theme—that our animating principles may have been corrupted, but can still be cured. Every soul is Aphrodite: every living being, that is, is rightly conceived as beautiful—and also, perhaps, as dangerous since the Fall. In the words of Hildegard of Bingen, before Adam fell “what is now gall in him sparkled like crystal, and bore the taste of good works, and what is now melancholy in man shone in him like the dawn and contained in itself the wisdom and perfection of good works; but when Adam broke the law, the sparkle of innocence was dulled in him, and his eyes, which had formerly beheld heaven, were blinded, and his gall was changed to bitterness, and his melancholy to blackness.”³⁷

And what is the eventual goal of this endeavor but to see things “as they are”?

One must not then suppose that the gods and the “exceedingly blessed spectators” in the higher world contemplate propositions (*axiomata*), but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real. This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances (V 8 [31], 5f).

That is also why Plotinus’ appeal to “intellect” is—emphatically—not in praise of abstract reasoning. Intellect “out of its mind” with joy is as close as we can hope to be to God.³⁸ We are being invited, in short, to join “the dance of immortal love,” to put aside our ordinary preconceptions, beliefs, perceptions and allow the real Forms to take shape in our souls, or rather to be noticed. The

37 Klibansky et al 1964: 80, citing Hildegard of Bingen 1903: 43.

38 *Ennead* VI 7 [38], 35; see also VI 7 [38], 30, 24ff.

nympholept may be more than inspired—they may be divinized. Even Hylas, according to the story, was the object of a cult for the citizens of Kios, bullied into the practice by an irate Heracles!³⁹

So where does this leave Film? Those who are tugged “down” into the Other World are at once an allegory of the Soul’s original fall into this material world and a moral lesson, to turn round again to face our actual duties. Those who are encouraged—by dance or spectacle or moving statues—to take on or embody or let slip the demonic aspects of their own nature may both indicate the *dangers* of false pride and passion, but also make a way to retrieve the lives we have, perhaps, forgotten. Even if we avoid *prelest*, of course, not every imagining is great art. Charles Williams remarked that some poems, at most, remind us that “man has a capacity for heroism,” but do not truly awaken it. “They thrill us, and thrills are good, only one cannot live by thrills.”⁴⁰ Other, greater works may stir at least “our desire for, our recognition of, that capacity,” even if—for that very reason—we are made to realize how hard it is to be heroic, and how far a *genuine* heroism differs from mere confidence, mere success.⁴¹

Films, like other fictions, can inspire—but what they inspire, how much, and in what mode, will rest with us. And it may be that “intellectuals” are the least able to let themselves be inspired: it is much more likely that we shall find fault, diminish what the images pretend, and retreat to our own self-satisfaction. We don’t really *want* to be moved. We prefer to think that the moral must always be: “go home.” And that “home” is always the familiar place. Elsewhere, perhaps, and otherwhen, only heroes even survive; elsewhere and otherwhen there are no comfortable answers, and the only hope (or else despair) “lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—to be redeemed from fire by fire.”⁴²

39 See Sourvinou-Inwood 2005: 109–111; Pache 2011.

40 Williams 1961: 4–5. Cf. Chesterton 2015: 124: “In literature to be dispassionate is simply to be illiterate. To be disinterested is simply to be uninterested. The object of a book on comets, of course, is not to make us all feel like comets; but the object of a poem about warriors is to make us all feel like warriors” [4th January 1905].

41 A recent essay by the author and actor Michael Witwer on the supposed “Bane of Banality” (<http://www.tor.com/2015/10/12/the-bane-of-banality-frodo-baggins/>: accessed 20/10/2015) comprehensively misses Tolkien’s moral insight by suggesting that Frodo is a wimp, a failure, a disappointment—as though a better story would have involved a Fearless Hero triumphantly accomplishing his task, without significant assistance. This is exactly the error of *prelest*, or the preference for “thrills.” It is encouraging that everyone who comments on Witwer’s essay points out his error.

42 T.S. Eliot *Four Quartets: Little Gidding* [1942] [4, lines 5–7], after John of the Cross 2003: 69 [2.12.1]: “this dark night of loving fire, as it purges in the darkness, so also in the darkness enkindles the soul. We shall likewise be able to see that, even as spirits are purged in the

3 Escape without Going Anywhere

And so back to Heracles—last seen howling after Hylas and bullying the Ki-ans. Heracles was from the beginning portrayed as a muscle-bound barbarian with a club, unjustly treated, adulterous and sometimes homicidal—a suitable focus for all manner of wish-fulfilment fantasies. At the same time he was the rightful king, appointed to rid the world of monsters (mostly by careful wit, not violence), and raised up to Heaven after his painful death. Hylas is pulled into the watery realm by nymphs, and Heracles fails to find and rescue him from madness. But Heracles had more success, it is said, on another mythical occasion. Prometheus was bound naked to a rock, daily attacked by an eagle, until Heracles managed to release him. This, so Plotinus tells us, is an allegory, showing how our “higher self” may free us from delusion, from the overwhelming attractions of the material world (IV 3 [27], 14, 12–14). And he also rescues Alcestis from the grave. The *barbarous* Heracles, his mere shadow, Plotinus tells us, wanders the Underworld, imprisoned by his memories, while Heracles himself is spared those torments.⁴³ This was not an eccentric notion.

It is generally agreed that during the whole time which Heracles spent among men he submitted to great and continuous labors and perils willingly, in order that he might confer benefits upon the race of men and thereby gain immortality.

DIODORUS, *History*, vol. 1, 1.2.4

Socrates had sworn by him, and Xenophon's band of mercenaries regularly prayed to “Zeus the Saviour and Heracles the guide” (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 4.8; 6.5). He was honored in Carthage as well as Rome, and by emperors as well as wandering Cynics.

The imperial theology of the greatest of the persecutors [for example, Diocletian (244–311 AD)] had important features in common with the religion which they persecuted. Jupiter is the supreme god. His son,

next life with dark material fire, so in this life they are purged and cleansed with the dark spiritual fire of love.” Eliot's verse, incidentally, refers back to the fabled death of Heracles, consumed by “the intolerable shirt of flame” woven by Deianeira in mistaken love.

43 *Ennead* IV 3 [27], 27 after Homer, *Odyssey* 11.601ff; see also IV 3 [27], 32, 24f; I 1 [53], 12, 32–40.

Hercules, acts as his executive representative, and is a benefactor of man. The resemblance to Christian theology is obvious.⁴⁴

This judgment oddly neglects the many ethical and metaphysical dissimilarities (it is, for example, a sort of Nestorian solution to the problem of two natures)! But the central point is accurate. Heracles may be either the false hero, drunkard, bully, adulterer, or else the genuine world-protector, savior and higher self. In this he is like our modern “stars”: “the star has two lives: that of his films and his real life” (Morin 2005: 40)—and who is to say which life—Jack Slater’s or Arnold Schwarzenegger’s (*Last Action Hero*)—is the more real? Their stories may—as Plato would have feared—encourage our worst features, or else open up a hope for something better than the dream and delirium of ordinary living. So also films and fictions in general: they may both allegorize and exemplify temptation, and also—sometimes—be a gateway to a better world, beside which ordinary life itself turns out a dream. Truman walks out of the film set, and Neo from the dream, helped—in both cases—by someone or something living outside the delusion. So perhaps the nymphs—including Sylvia/Lauren in *The Truman Show*, talking beside the lake—may, contrary to the original version, be the ones to *rescue* us? Not all “nympholepts” are frenzied or befuddled: sometimes, as Socrates insisted, they may be inspired, and begin to speak in verse!⁴⁵ And maybe “stars,” whether they are conceived as merely lucky or as avatars of superheroes, are also sometimes “gateways” (see Morrison 2012: 267–272). Maybe in a little while the very figures they portray in film—and with whom they are often oddly identified—will “free themselves from the screen and from the darkness of the theaters to go and walk in public spaces and the apartments of each and every person” (Morin 2005: 43). And maybe we need not wait: as Plotinus already taught us, “every man is double, one of him is the sort of compound being and one of him is himself.”⁴⁶ The Cave of the Nymphs, where Odysseus finds himself on his return from fairyland to Ithaca, has passages both to the everyday world and to the celestial: which way he is meant to go may remain unsettled, even in Porphyry’s allegory (Porphyry 1917: *De antro nympharum* 10–14). The Cave opens in both directions.

44 Liebeschuetz 1979: 242–243. De Blois 1976: 149–150 notes that it was Plotinus’s patron Gallienus who revived Heracles as a focus for imperial loyalty, and his own self-image (he also invoked Mercury, “Genius Populi Romani,” Demeter, Zeus and the Sun: 150–9).

45 Plato *Phaedrus* 238c; see Connor 1988.

46 *Ennead* 11 3, [52].9, 31–3; see Clark 1996.

But if film images—and our own imagined *daimones*—are to be such a gateway perhaps we should recall the Orthodox warning about how to design and understand icons. There is an odd reversal in the passage from pagan to Christian Platonism. For Plotinus reflections, shadows, pictures more often stand for the lesser world, for delusion, while statues, automata and living pantomimes are at least reminders of the higher world. Orthodox Christians chose textured icons, “mixed-media reliefs,” and added that they must be designed and painted by those who at least *intended* holiness and would follow the tradition without adding personal, self-gratifying detail. Interestingly, some iconophiles have treated icons simply as symbolic structures, coded messages, but the probable majority opinion, or at least the earlier opinion, is that “icons come to life” and “exist on the verge of speech.”⁴⁷ They are more like gateways themselves than mere *images* of gateways—not that they were exactly *transparent*, but rather “layered with a series of material covers, each reflecting light.”⁴⁸ Eleventh-century Komnenian iconoclasm preserved the *paintings* as mere “likenesses” of their original, where the more orthodox view was that the textured icons embodied a real presence, really attentive to the iconodule (Pentcheva 2010: 198–208). That is also how we imagine, or wish to imagine, film-entities.

People are drawn into films, in particular films about people drawn into films, and either learn the importance of returning “home” to ordinary life or else begin to realize how much that “ordinary life” is structured by the very tropes and stereotypes they were watching. Inspiring films may only inspire an exactly similar plotline, serving our individual or tribal fantasies: we carry the film out with us when we leave. The more optimistic fancy is that we might begin to live by *better* standards, and so make a better world—a fancy that Plotinus at least thought dangerous (*Ennead* 11 9 [33], 5, 24f). People really convinced that this world is a dream—like the imagined heroes of *The Matrix*—may treat us all as figments, due to be cleared away by the New Day Dawning, merely—for example—“Tory scum” or “Western infidels.” That they themselves might need to be cleared away or radically transformed is a thought too harsh—for us as well as them. *Prelest* is difficult to detect in ourselves, and yet more difficult to escape.

According to Plato, “when a man drinks wine he begins to be better pleased with himself, and the more he drinks the more he is filled full of brave hopes, and conceit of his power, and at last the string of his tongue is loosened, and

47 Tsakiridou 2013, 3–4, contrasting the accounts of Nicephorus of Constantinople and St. John Damascene.

48 Pentcheva 2010:194. Pentcheva pays particular attention (2010: 183–198) to the writings of Michael Psellos (1018–78?) on the icon as *empuschos graphe*, “animated inscription.”

fancying himself wise, he is brimming over with lawlessness, and has no more fear or respect, and is ready to do or say anything.”⁴⁹ But there is another sort of drunkenness, already mentioned. We may instead be “drunk with nectar” (VI 7 [38], 35), exhilarated by grace. And the route to that inebriation, so Plotinus says, is—in a way—an easy one.

Let us fly to our dear country. What then is our way of escape, and how are we to find it? We shall put out to sea, as Odysseus did, from the witch Circe or Calypso—as the poet says (I think with a hidden meaning)—and was not content to stay though he had delights of the eyes and lived among much beauty of sense. Our country from which we came is There, our Father is There. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.

Ennead I 6 [1], 8, 16–28

Odysseus was right to refuse either to be a brute, for Circe, or a demigod, for Calypso. But his return to Ithaca was not simply to go home, but also to rescue Ithaca. The boldness and brutality of that rescue, in Homer’s story, may conceal the message (see Lamberton 1986). We should not after all think merely mortal thoughts, being mortal, but strive as far as possible to *immortalize* ourselves (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1177b31–4). Paradoxically, in climbing (as it were) to heaven we simultaneously discover our own littleness, as Scipio did in one of the seminal stories of European culture. In his dream ascent he saw “stars which we never see from here below, and all the stars were vast far beyond what we have ever imagined. The least of them was that which, farthest from heaven, nearest to the earth, shone with a borrowed light. But the starry globes very far surpassed the earth in magnitude. The earth itself indeed looked to me so small as to make me ashamed of our empire, which was a mere point on its surface.”⁵⁰ And the earth itself a mere blue dot.

49 Plato, *Laws* 1.649. But cf. *Laws* 2.666: “The other story implied that wine was given man out of revenge, and in order to make him mad; but our present doctrine, on the contrary, is, that wine was given him as a balm, and in order to implant modesty in the soul, and health and strength in the body.”

50 “Dream of Scipio,” Cicero *Republic* Bk 6, ch.3, tr. Andrew P. Peabody: http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_cic_scipiodream.htm (last accessed 12/11/2014).

Are there yet any films with this moral? It may be feared that even such Gnostic thrillers, as they remind us that we are ordinarily deluded, encourage mere conceit, and contempt for our fellow dreamers. Science Fiction in general is sometimes a sort of cult, promising its devotees that they—unlike their stolid neighbors—are ready to live on into the Future, through the Singularity. There are occasional attempts at a better moral, as for example *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick 2011). But consider one other, much more vulgar, trope: by imagining oneself, one's heroes, shrunk to smaller and smaller size, "down" into the tiny, the microscopic, "the infinitesimal," we discover that there are no privileged *scales* any more than privileged directions, times or places, that "there was no point of non-existence in the universe" (Matheson 2014: 200), that our ordinary world is also unimaginably tiny by cosmic standards. At the very limit and conclusion of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) the battered—and very unlikeable—hero Scott Carey is at last enlightened:

I was continuing to shrink, to become... what? The infinitesimal? What was I? Still a human being? Or was I the man of the future? If there were other bursts of radiation, other clouds drifting across seas and continents, would other beings follow me into this vast new world? So close—the infinitesimal and the infinite. But suddenly, I knew they were really the two ends of the same concept. The unbelievably small and the unbelievably vast eventually meet—like the closing of a gigantic circle. I looked up, as if somehow I would grasp the heavens. The universe, worlds beyond number, God's silver tapestry spread across the night. And in that moment, I knew the answer to the riddle of the infinite. I had thought in terms of man's own limited dimension. I had presumed upon nature. That existence begins and ends is man's conception, not nature's. And I felt my body dwindling, melting, becoming nothing. My fears melted away. And in their place came acceptance. All this vast majesty of creation, it had to mean something. And then I meant something, too. Yes, smaller than the smallest, I meant something, too. To God, there is no zero. I still exist!⁵¹

51 *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) Closing Monologue, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp3iHjGBfT4>, last accessed 18/09/2015. The film version of Matheson's book was written by him, and directed by Jack Arnold. There is apparently a reboot on the horizon, probably with better special effects. In the novel Carey does not expect anyone else to follow him "down," but rather hopes that his "new world" might also contain its own native intelligence. Nor is there any mention of God.

Realizing his own smallness in the face of Everything and slowly shedding his vices, the protagonist at last realizes *God's* glory, in the sphere that is full of living faces, shining with living faces, at all scales and times and places. We may be pulled, the shrinking man may be pulled, inexorably “downwards” only that he, that we, may “hold infinity in the palm of [our] hand, and eternity in an hour.”⁵² Sadly, the conclusion may, for most of us, be merely sentimental—a momentary thrill to be forgotten as we fall asleep once more. Just possibly, sometimes, some people may stay awake, caught up into the larger world, and out of the maw of the multiplex.

But there is one last, wholly un-Plotinian twist. How do we know that the larger world is lovely? The world outside the Matrix is a wasteland, and most of “free humanity” is housed in a dismal underground city far removed from the lively possibilities allowed at least *some* victims in the computer-generated fiction. In Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1999) our heroes momentarily see an expanse of sand and sunlight, which they think is the “Shell Beach” of their implanted memories: it turns out to be only an electrically lit hoarding. Tearing it down in fury, and the brick wall behind it, they uncover only the void. Their whole constantly reimagined, constantly rebuilt, city is no more than an island, a star-ship, in the vaster, uninhabitable dark, an “image constantly reimagined” in another sense than the Plotinian (see *Ennead* 11 3 [52], 18, 17). The hero “is a Glaucon who comes to realize that Socrates' tale of an upper, more real world, is itself a shadow, a forgery” (Loughlin 2004: 46–48). The best reality for us is only the one we make—and that is how that film concludes, with the former makers and inventors overthrown and the city rebuilt again according to *our* heart's desire. “Imagination” said Blake, is “the real and Eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more.”⁵³ Blake himself believed, with Plotinus, that the real world was not only *our* imagination, and wrote, in 1827, that “in The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever” he was “stronger and stronger as [his] Foolish Body decay[ed].”⁵⁴ Moderns, it appears, have rather less hope of this. If they are right then we may prefer after all to live a fantasy than to break out from the cave.⁵⁵ But maybe the fantasy, as moderns must consider it, is true, and the larger, waking world after all is lovable.

52 Blake's “Auguries of Innocence” [1803] (1966: 431).

53 Blake *Jerusalem* plate 77: 1966: 717.

54 Blake “To George Cumberland, 12th April 1827”: 1966: 878.

55 As Puddleglum, not quite sincerely, suggests in Lewis 2009: 190.

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Beyond the Moving Images: A Plotinian Reading of *The Truman Show*

Giannis Stamatellos

Let us fly to our dear country

PLOTINUS *Ennead* I 6, 8, 16



Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) lives a happy life in an artificial “cave,” an idyllic, ordered and peaceful place, “Seahaven Island,” the largest studio ever constructed, conceived and designed by a “televisionary” and eccentric director Christof (Ed Harris). Truman is the “star” of the show, broadcasted for thirty years non-stop and unedited for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to millions of people around the globe. His life is “live” through an “intricate network of hidden cameras” all over Seahaven studio. Truman is not yet aware that he is the main “role” in a TV reality show, that wife, friends, colleagues and relatives are just “actors” in the show. However, after a number of unpredictable anomalies in the flow of the show, Truman realizes the counterfeit nature of his reality and escapes his virtual realm of Seahaven.

Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* (1998), written by Andrew Niccol, has been approached from various philosophical perspectives particularly in relation to Cartesian skepticism and the question of the external world (Blessing 2005), Sartrean existentialism and the affirmation of individual freedom (Falzon 2014), and some accounts of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (Gilbert Barberà 2003; Foley 2006). However, despite the aforementioned philosophical approaches, no Neoplatonic interpretation of the film has been offered. In this chapter I aim to offer a Plotinian reading of *The Truman Show* with special reference to Plotinus’ dual-aspect theory of the soul and human freedom. I shall argue that *The Truman Show* can be interpreted as a discourse on selfhood, self-determination, and individual freedom in self-transcendence.

1 The Allegory of Seahaven

The Truman Show has been discussed in terms of Cartesian doubt and skeptical challenge of reality. It has been suggested that a Cartesian perspective shows the importance of leaving behind the disingenuous elements of our world and the comfort of the real, in order to risk in the unknown; as Kimberly Blessing notes, it is this decision to explore the unexplored “like Truman hanging over the edge of the boat, that we come to know who we truly are, and for Descartes, *that* we truly are. It’s here that we find ourselves. It’s here that we find truth, it’s here that we begin to find meaning for our lives” (Blessing 2005: 14–15). Descartes’s doubt of reality takes us back to ancient skepticism (7), as well as to the two schools of the Hellenistic Age: the first being that of the Pyrrhonian Skeptics or the school of Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–c. 270 BCE), and the second being the school of the Skeptical Academy or the critical dialecticians of Plato’s Academy such as Arcesilaus (316/5–241/0 BCE) and Carneades (214–129/8 BCE).

On the one hand, Pyrrho maintained the idea of negative epistemology; he thought that “knowing anything for sure is impossible,” and proposed that a speechless attitude (*ou mallon*) and suspension of judgement (*epochē*) lead us to the balance of mind and therefore to the true tranquility of soul, detached and free from any disturbance (*ataraxia*). On the other hand, Arcesilaus and Carneades abandoned the positive metaphysics of the Academy and devoted themselves to a destructive criticism and skepticism of Plato’s teaching, taking the Socratic claim of ignorance in the early Platonic dialogues literally by stating their own famous affirmation of ignorance: “I know that I do not know” (Armstrong 1966: 138–140; Wright 2009: 139). Arcesilaus questioned the Stoic criterion of truth by rejecting “cognitive impression” (*phantasia katalēptikē*) and so accepting the suspension of judgment about everything (Vogt 2014).

In *The Truman Show* suspension of judgment seems to be an inherent element of human cognition expressed in our rejection of doubting what is real, as Christof himself replies to Mike Michaelson, the journalist of TruTalk (Truman Show’s TV forum):

MIKE: Christof, let me ask you, why do you think that uh, Truman has never come close to discovering the true nature of his world until now?

CHRISTOF: We accept the reality of the world with which we’re presented. It’s as simple as that.

(Transcript)

The latter statement encapsulates Christof’s main conception for the creation of the *Truman Show*. Christof suggests an “uncritical state” of human

cognition; since “we” accept the reality that is presented to us, without doubt, Truman will not challenge the true nature of his world. Christof considers, as the architect of the show, that humans commonly follow an uncritical path in life; humans prefer an unexplored life (echoing the Socratic claim) rather than reflecting and exploring on the nature of their reality.

Christof seems to consider an *a priori* suspension of judgement; however not as a result of the skeptical journey but in the complete absence of doubt. This claim of an uncritical state of human condition leads Christof to a moral decision: to offer Truman a chance to live a “normal life” in Seahaven, a life without lies and deceit. As he replies to the hateful comments of Sylvia (Natascha McElhone): “Seahaven is the way that the world should be.” Christof believes that Truman willingly stays in his “cell” by downgrading Truman’s desire for freedom to a “vague ambition”:

SYLVIA: He’s not a performer, he’s a prisoner. Look at him. Look at what you’ve done to him.

CHRISTOF: He could leave at any time. If his was more than just a vague ambition, if he was absolutely determined to discover the truth, there’s no way we could prevent him. I think what distresses you, really, caller, is that ultimately, Truman prefers his “cell,” as you call it.

SYLVIA: That’s where you’re wrong. You’re so wrong. And he’ll prove you wrong.

(Transcript)

The conversation between Sylvia and Christof seems to recall Plato’s allegory of the cave in the *Republic* (514a–520a). Plato’s aim is to emphasize the importance of education in our life considering particularly its absence in our natural state. For Plato people are usually enslaved by the powers of the perceptible images. Humans live as chained prisoners in a cave and the only things they can see are the blank walls of the cave. Behind the prisoners burns a fire and between the fire and the prisoners, puppeteers hold up puppets and cast their shadows on the wall of the cave. For Plato, as for Christof, the prisoners believe that truth is the knowledge of these shadows and not the real objects behind them. Only one prisoner, the philosopher, who can escape to the sunlight, is able to find the truth and see the beauty of the true world beyond the fake world of the cave (Cooper 1997).

Truman at the end of the film exits the show, and escapes from the shadows and images produced by Christof. The philosopher in Plato’s allegory, like Truman in the Seahaven allegory, is a prisoner who escapes the cave and goes beyond the moving images of the shadows to recognize in the upper-world outside the cave true light and the reality of true beings beyond the fake images of

the cave. Sailing on his boat to the edge of his world, Truman reaches the end of the fake horizon and crashes into the cave walls of Seahaven, the blue sky of the “painted cyclorama.”

Truman looks upward, straining his eyes to see the top of the sky, but it curves away at a steep angle beyond his sight. Clinging to the boat with one hand, he tentatively reaches out towards the painted cyclorama. He touches the sky.

NICCOL, 1998, 157

Truman touches the Seahaven cyclorama, the wall of the Seahaven cave and realizes the end of the unreal. Truman is now able to distinguish the virtual from the real. Truman's journey to realization follows Plato's divided line (Uebersax 2014), the Platonic path of cognition, starting from appearances and images of Seahaven to understanding and stepping beyond to the Real:

Imagination (*eikasia*)—Perceiving Appearances, Shadows and Images in Seahaven

Belief (*pistis*)—Observing anomalies in Seahaven

Thinking (*dianoia*)—Understanding the counterfeit reality of Seahaven

Intelligence (*noesis*)—Transcending Seahaven to the Real

Plato ends the allegory of the cave by describing the return of the freed prisoner to his fellow prisoners to persuade them to recognize the sham reality of the cave and ascend with him to the upper world of light beyond the moving images. However, at the end of the allegory, the prisoners prefer their cave and put the philosopher to death (Cooper 1997).

Christof “proved wrong” to treat Truman as a “prisoner” who ultimately prefers his “cell.” Christof's trick was to create a cave more beautiful, peaceful and secure than the outside world, an illusionary beauty that would cancel the desire of Truman, like that of Plato's philosopher, to escape. However, Christof's Seahaven is Plato's cave reversed. Seahaven is the apotheosis of deception, illustrated with pseudo-ideals, perfect morals and happy ideologies. Christof portrayed in the Seahaven what Plato's philosopher found in the world of the Forms outside the cave in the *Republic*. Beauty and light have been internalized and incorporated as light shadows and images in the Seahaven cave.

The world outside the cave is an unpredictable place with the same “deceit and lies” as Christof said about Seahaven. However, the deceit in Seahaven is controlled. Christof has replaced the world of Plato's cave with that of Forms.

Seahaven is the ideal place to live, an artificial world of security, peace and beauty, a better copy than the original world but created in a studio. The walls of the studio are not blank and dark rocks reflecting the shadows of things, but full of light and splendor reflecting the perfection of a counterfeit reality. Christof internalized the Platonic Forms in the studio to persuade Truman to stay in the cave and the show.

However, Christof mistakenly left out truth and goodness from his design. It is not only the clichéd behavior of Truman's fellow actors but also the original goodness and brilliance of Truman's character *per se*. Truman chooses to leave his beautiful but fake cave; it is not the beauty or the ugliness of the cave world that direct his decision, but his desire for freedom and exploration. Christof's ideal moralization of Seahaven and character perfectionism leads to a failure, and as Plotinus might put it, in a play all figures—heroes, anti-heroes, servants or yokels—are equally important for its completion (*Ennead* III 2, 11). Even more erroneous than the fake moving images on the studio wall, or even Truman's fake relationships, is Truman's change from an old to a "new-self." Truman oscillates in the film between an old-self of conformity and predictability, to a new-self of non-conformity and unpredictability, echoing the Plotinian dual selfhood of one soul with two selves, a lower-self related to the perceptible realm and a higher-self related to Intellect.

2 One Soul, Two Selves

The Plotinian soul is not fettered to a body; the *psyche* is not bound in a cave, not chained in a cell. For Plotinus the soul is a higher intelligible being never fully descended in a body (IV 8). As an illumination of the divine Intellect, the soul has divine origins and precedes ontologically the perceptible world. Thus, as Plotinus claims, the soul should not be conceived as enslaved in the body but the body as illuminated by the soul (IV 3, 22, 1–13). In the Plotinian hylomorphism, the bodies are created through the projection of the soul on the mirror of matter. The perceptible bodies are composite entities of matter and form (II 4, 2, 15), but they are still mere representations—"images drawn on the shadow" (VI 3, 8, 35–36; III 6, 14, 25). The higher intelligible or divine part of the soul is not affected by the lower part attached to the bodies (IV 3, 12; III 6.7–13; V, 1, 9, 20–34). For Plotinus, our soul has a double nature and a double life (IV 8, 4, 19), living and participating in the intelligible and the perceptible world at the same time. Each soul is one and unique, related to all other souls and all souls are one (IV 9). The Plotinian soul is an amphibian being *per se*:

Souls, then, become, as it were, amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life There (the intelligible world), and the life here (the perceptible world): those which are able to be more in the company of Intellect live the life There more, but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more the life here below. (IV 8, 4, 32, trans. Armstrong modified)

Each soul has a dual-aspect nature being partly intelligible and partly perceptible (IV 8, 7, 1), it has a share in a higher-upper realm of the Forms and a lower-down realm of the senses occupying a middle rank at the common boundary between the intelligible and the perceptible worlds (IV 8, 7, 5); “for every soul has something of what is below, in the direction of the body, and what is above in the direction of intellect” (IV 8, 8, 11–16). Therefore, each single *psyche* embraces two selves at the same time, a higher self, situated in the intelligible realm, that is the world of the intelligible beings, and a lower self, placed in the perceptible realm, that is, the world of the animated bodies (Stern-Gillet 2009).

However, Plotinus insists that the lower perceptible part of the soul is able to return and be united with its superior part through the realization of the intelligible supremacy of the soul and the higher origins of its divine self. The first step for the soul is to turn inwards in its consciousness and then to ascend upwards to its intelligible self (I 7, 8). This is a process of purification, but ascending from the perceptible to the intelligible self is not immediate but progressive, a slow and demanding process of a virtuous life and contemplation of the inconceivable beauty of the intelligible world. The soul which recognizes the higher beauty of the Forms and compares it with the sensible beauty of the bodies, understands not to pursue them; “we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image” (I 7, 8, 7–8).

Like the Plotinian higher soul, Truman is the “true man” who goes beyond the moving images, traces, and shadows from his counterfeit life in the show. Some irregularities in the production of the show make him think about the reliability of his reality. However, Truman’s doubt of his world is not based on a Cartesian-type recognition of the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, but mainly due to a realization of his “true self” that transcends Seahaven, in the original unity of a “true man” beyond the perceptible realm. Truman progressively realizes the fake nature of his reality. He trusts his own judgment and slowly becomes another, a *new self*. Whereas his “old self” is predictable and kindhearted within a life of routine, conformity and responsibility to his job, marriage and life, his “new self” is rebellious, critical and

unpredictable for the normality of the show, expressed by his desperate and impulsive reaction trying to get away from Seahaven in his car along with reluctant Meryl:

MERYL: Truman, where are we going?

TRUMAN: I don't know. I guess I'm being spontaneous.

MERYL: Oh!

TRUMAN: Somebody help me! I'm being spontaneous!

(Transcript)

Truman's new self is unpredictable, without plans. The randomness of Truman's actions is a revolt against Christof's well-established and calculated plans. Christof always tried to keep Truman in the show with a number of ways such as feeling responsible for his father's death, obliged to take care of his mother and his family, and being responsible for his job duties. However, Truman's love for Sylvia was an unpredictable factor in the show flow, as well as the recognition of his father in the face of a homeless person. More importantly, Truman, as Christof explains, was an inquisitive and explorative personality, "curious from birth, premature by two weeks, it was almost as if he couldn't wait to get started."

Truman's liberal persona remained pure in himself, always feeling like a teenager, a vital need to travel and explore, the desire to learn about new things and live new experiences. Truman is a passionate and courageous character for love and exploration. These qualities or virtues of Truman were always in his character despite the control of Christof. Truman's new self embryonically reveals itself inside the basement of his house where he constantly returns to reflect on his memories of the past, the traumatic moments of his father's death and his love for Sylvia.

Truman turns first inwards in the basement of his memories and passions and then turns upwards in the escape to the real world beyond Seahaven. In particular, Truman escapes from the show in two movements of realization: firstly, inside his basement where all memories from his childhood, his father and his love for Sylvia remain alive in an old suitcase and secondly, outside Seahaven in the final escape. Truman is changing through recollection, as for Plotinus, "the memory of a higher self is what holds the soul back from falling, it keeps it higher and the soul becomes what it remembers" (IV 4, 3, 3–6).

Truman's journey from the old self to the new self, from the outer man of the role-Truman to the inner man of the "true man," is led, in a Platonic sense of *eros*, by the eyes of Sylvia. Likewise, for Plotinus, the inner man is related to the

higher intelligible self, while the outer man is related to the lower perceptible self. The inner man remains unaffected by the events of life, it is the outside man who suffers. However, Plotinus asserts, that the outer man is a "role" in the many "stages" of earthly life. Tragic moments in life should not be taken seriously, but they should be regarded as incidents in the plot of a play and it is not the inner man who takes part in the "game of life" but the outer-man, that is, "the outside shadow of man (...) has to take off the costume in which he is dressed," while the inner man remains unaffected by external conditions (III 2, 15, 43–57).

As Truman's original self, for Plotinus the "true man" is the authentic man, the higher part and self of the soul which reasons and understands its intelligible origins (I 1, 7, 14–24). The human soul is freed through the noetic ascent of its lower perceptible self to its higher intelligible self. However, the distinction between the intelligible and perceptible self in Plotinus as in the case of *Truman Show* is not again of a Cartesian mind-body dualism; the Plotinian lower and higher soul, like Truman's old and new self, is one and homogenous and the two selves are two aspects of the same nature. Even if the world of the senses, the world of Seahaven, is made up of images or shadows, the soul *per se* remains pure and unaffected. Similarly, Truman, despite his presence in the show, and despite the fake attitudes of his fellow actors in a fraudulent life, remains pure and authentic by constantly concentrating on its true and original self. As Christof admits about Truman: "While the world he inhabits is in some respects counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself."

Truman's ignorance of his virtual world helps him to remain pure and original at a first level. However, even when he realizes the counterfeit nature of Seahaven he remains self-disciplined and controlled, focused on his ultimate purpose to escape from Seahaven to the real world. Truman's quiet and gentle self changes progressively through the realization of the counterfeit nature of his world. Truman distinguishes between the camera-self, that is, the old-outer-Truman who acts in Seahaven, and the new-inner-Truman, who is a free self in his mind of thought and inspiration. Likewise, for Plotinus, the higher self is the "true man" purified. At the end of the process of purification, the soul has changed, becoming another higher and purified self: a true intelligible self, unaffected by fears and weaknesses, but complete and self-sufficient in the excellence of virtue (I 4, 14–20). Truman, as Plotinus' wise man (*spoudaios*) is reformed to a new-free-self, who does not fear death (V 1, 6, 11) and is not afraid to leave behind the "secure" fake life of Seahaven for an "insecure" life of freedom. In a Plotinian perspective, Truman's virtues of courage and goodness "purify" the soul in its self-definition to determine his true self beyond the idyllic images and shadows of Seahaven. Truman's step into the unknown, beyond the moving images of Seahaven, begins with a wish for self-determination.

3 Virtue Has No Master

Christopher Falzon, in his article “Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* and Sartrean Freedom,” offers an existential reading of the film with special reference to the Sartrean affirmation of individual freedom. As Falzon states, “the film reveals a strong, Sartrean commitment to the individual’s capacity for self-determination” (Falzon 2014: 18). Falzon concludes that the *Truman Show* could be interpreted as an existential movie “not only in its affirmation of individual freedom but also in so far as it shares the limitations of Sartre’s existentialism” (Falzon 2014: 30). It is on this basis that a Plotinian approach of human freedom and self-determination is enlightening in the film.

Plotinus defines self-determination in close relation to human freedom as an inner power of the soul to be self-governed and self-affirmed. A self-determined individual is free when it is not defined by external circumstances. In treatise VI 8 (*On the voluntary and the wish of the One*), Plotinus particularly maintains that human freedom is not a matter of choice, contingency or absence of coercion but to the true freedom of the self (Leroux 1996). Human freedom is not necessarily defined by voluntary choice, but it is manifested in the virtuous life of the soul (VI 8, 1–7). Plotinus maintains that a free action: must be voluntary, conscious and self-determined (Eliasson 2008). An action can falsely be regarded as free and voluntary if there is no obligation to act; nor is an action knowledgeable if the person follows the path of reason uncritically. An action depends on the person only if the person establishes itself as a self-determined principle that is “to be master of its own self” (VI 8, 3, 20–26). As Remes maintains, truth, goodness, and freedom are independent from human action (Remes 2007: 81), and therefore the action of a free and self-determined moral agent reflects its true inner freedom and the perfection of the soul.

Truman progressively becomes master of himself. He finds self-affirmation in determining the meaning and direction in his life in the face of a constraining and repressive social situation. He even sometimes questions his life beyond common reason. Truman’s doubt is not only determined by a challenge of the external world but also by an inward justification of the self in contrast to the others. Likewise, for Plotinus, an action is self-determined when it is purely defined by internal conditions. However, for Plotinus, self-determination is not an unqualified term (Remes 2007: 184–185); it is not an inclination of the soul without reason and purpose. Empty self-determination might cause individuation and fragmentation of the self. Self-determination is thus an inward return to the unity of the self; and autonomy is an internal action of the soul to its higher self beyond heteronomous outward actions determined by external factors and conditions (VI 8, 6, 19–23).

Likewise, Truman is not defined externally but internally. Truman's freedom, in contrast to a Sartrean perspective, is not the result of an endless conflict with the other but "is expressed solely through escape, through the rejection of others in order to enjoy unlimited self-determination" (Falzon 2014: 27). Whereas for Sartre a self, although free, always remains situated and longs for determination even as it escapes it, for Plotinus a self can be entirely free, in pure self-determination beyond any constraint and assaults of passions. An action really depends on us when it comes from our own will to contemplate beyond any compulsion or chance (VI 8, 1, 21–30). The result of a self-determined soul is a will for positive freedom in active contemplation of Intellect and the One. The soul which becomes conscious of the limitations of the sensible reality is becoming a self-making soul, totally self-determined without any master and at its own disposal, totally self-identified with its will, not enslaved to anything else but truly free in itself by being truly itself (VI 8, 20–21).

Truman is self-defined, totally determined to discover the truth of his world at the moment when the secret of Seahaven is revealed. His desire to escape from the show is not only a sign of rebellion but also a quest for happiness, a return to true freedom. Truman accepts the insecurity of freedom instead of the security of Seahaven. Christof believes that Truman will prefer the security and comfort of Seahaven. However, Truman is determined to discover the truth by realizing his true identity and freedom of his mind.

Plotinus also maintains that freedom is in the mind in pure contemplation of its higher intelligible reality. External activity is problematic and so he moves the importance of our actions from external practice to internal contemplation. For Plotinus there is no *praxis* that is purely dependent on us: "in practical actions self-determination and being in our power is not referred to practice and outward activity but to the inner activity of virtue itself, that is, its thought and contemplation" (VI 8, 6, 20–22). Being in our own power "does not belong to the realm of action but in intellect at rest from actions" (VI 8, 5, 35–37). Only virtue itself—as a pure intellectual activity—refines and frees the soul: virtue has "no master" (see Plato's *Republic* 617e3) and so intellectualizes the soul (VI 8, 5, 30–37).

However, in *The Truman Show*, society promotes conformity and discourages transgression (Falzon 2014). Truman rejects conformity. Christof's argument about the outside world as a "sick place" was not successful. Truman's decision to leave Seahaven was not based on the morality of the world but mainly of his own ethical decision for freedom and exploration. Truman makes the *difference* between the "sick" Seahaven and the "sick" outside world, and his decision to freely select the world that he likes to live in is based on this distinction. This means that; Truman's will for freedom precedes and determines morality.

It has been maintained that the film is a journey towards the affirmation of the sovereign individual capable of self-determination (Falzon 2014); however, the film also affirms the capacity to escape beyond the fake moving images of the show, beyond a fake identity to self-definition, to an existential return of Truman, through the dark exit corridor, to a new self, unknown to the audience; a virtual death that restarts a true life. Truman is not justified or affirmed through the gaze of the others but self-defined through introspection. Truman's self-image is not dependent on the others, but Truman's freedom exercises an escape from the others and the image that they have of him. True escape is not a flight from reality but a flight from a fake image of the self that is constructed by others.

Truman's decision to exit the show is a response to a passive acceptance of an "ideal world" directed by Christof. Truman's escape in the last scene of the film is a return to his own reality, a rebirth to his own but unknown life. It is a step that self-affirms his own existence beyond the definitiveness of feigned otherness. Truman's exit through the dark corridor and outside the artificial lights of Seahaven in the last scene of the film is a rejection not only of Christof, the actors, and the audience of the show but also an affirmation of Truman's own self. The exit door is a step further into himself; he goes beyond the artificial social relationships and life that entrap him, "leave[s] the artificiality of the constructed utopia, and conquer[s] the natural elements (a violent storm at sea) in order to attain selfhood" (Pratt and San Juan 2004: 203).

Truman's only outside reference is Sylvia, exiled from the show, who acts as the transcendent aim to liberate himself. Truman is not totally formed and influenced by his social environment but he remains pure in himself with his virtues and passions. This means that he is not self-deceived. The realization that he is observed by others is traumatic. Truman escapes Seahaven without coming back, as the Plotinian wise man flies away from the "cave" without turning around (O'Meara 2005). Truman does not regret escaping, and he does not feel any guilt for leaving behind the others, despite Christof's last attempts to persuade him to stay in the show.

Truman's self-realization is the beginning of a journey, a new life, an exploration beyond the moving images of Seahaven, beyond the "cave," into the real world. Truman leaves Seahaven after a final "touch" of realization on the Magrittean cyclorama at the end of the studio. One step before his exit, Truman opens the door and faces the dark threshold of a new life, beyond the Seahaven replicas and forgeries. At this moment of a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith" to the uncertainty of freedom, Christof speaks for the last time to the only "true man" in the show and gives him the permission to "speak." Truman immediately questions Christof:

TRUMAN: Who are you?

CHRISTOF: I am the creator of a television show that gives hope and joy and inspiration to millions.

TRUMAN: Then who am I?

CHRISTOF: You're the star.

TRUMAN: Was nothing real?

CHRISTOF: YOU were real. That's what made you so good to watch. Listen to me, Truman. There's no more truth out there than there is in the world I created for you. Same lies. The same deceit. But in my world, you have nothing to fear. I know you better than you know yourself.

TRUMAN: You never had a camera in my head!

(Transcript)

Christof shows his paternalistic power as the regulator of Truman's world. Christof is an all powerful being assisted by various technologies, commanding the actors, controlling the traffic and even the sun. However, while Truman's life is surveilled through the panopticon Lunar Room on the "221st floor of the OmniCam atmosphere," Christof's personal life has been "jealously guarded private." But Truman kept the privacy of his mind, the place where Christof could never put a camera, the inner space where Truman turned to find himself and to reflect on his life. For Truman and the actors there is no difference between private and public life. However, Truman finds privacy not by being alone, but by being self-defined in his own autonomy, expressed in his decision to end the show. Truman prefers the insecure and unpredictable world of Sylvia's *eros* rather than the secure and comfortable place of Christof. Truman's private self is not a "dark room" in Lockean terms, but a "dark passage," which is the path of self-determination leading to inner freedom in Plotinian terms.

Conclusion

Truman's escape is the beginning of a life and the "end of the journey," a journey that started from the inward (re)turn of Truman to himself, which is the same inward journey that the Plotinian soul experiences in its noetic ascent to the One through "a flight of the alone to the alone" (VI 9, 11, 50–51). Truman's inward turn is a turn to "true man"; an inner self which progressively changes Truman and becomes another Man, the "true man," living a double life, like the Plotinian psyche, both in the world of Seahaven and inside his own mind. However, *The Truman Show* confirms that we can go beyond this recognition;

there is always a power to escape, always an exit door to enter another world beyond our reality, a place where we transcend the external circumstances and define ourselves in sustaining our individual freedom. Truman as the Homeric hero in the *Odyssey* wishes to find his way to Ithaca, struggling with shadows, images and lies but even more with the god-like power and control of Christof. *The Truman Show* echoes Plotinus' advice to "fly to our dear country" (1 6, 8, 16). Like Truman, the way to escape is to put out to sea as Odysseus sailed away from the Circe and Calypso, away from the delights of the sensible beauty to the beauty of intellect, to the inner beauty of our free soul, in order to travel inwards to a world beyond images and shadows, beyond places and countries, to the realm of our true self, to step into the unknown with another way of seeing the real and ourselves.

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Being as Illumination of the One and Its Manifestation through Cinematic Images

Sebastian F. Moro Tornese

You know, when we were on that plane, I was fascinated by the way its shadow followed us. That silly shadow! Racing along over mountains and valleys, covering ten times the distance of the plane, and yet always there to greet us with outstretched arms when we landed. And I've been thinking that, somehow, you're that plane, and I'm that silly shadow. That all my life I've been rushing up and down hills, leaping rivers, crashing over obstacles, never dreaming that one day that beautiful thing in flight would land on this earth and into my arms.

ROBERT CONWAY (Ronald Colman) in *Lost horizon*, 1937, Frank Capra, based on James Hilton's novel.

...

For really here in the events of our life it is not the soul within but the outside shadow (*skia*) of man which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way on a stage which is the whole earth where men have in many places set up their stages.

PLOTINUS, *Ennead*, III 2, 15, 47–50

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1 Plotinus' Metaphysics of Light and Procession towards the Screen of Matter

In this chapter, I propose to study several aspects of Plotinus' philosophy that are valuable as an approach towards cinema. I take into account the interaction between aesthetics, metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology. It is well-known that these branches of knowledge were interrelated in Neoplatonism, where their combined study aimed at a unified conception of reality. The unity

of philosophical disciplines, sciences and arts, reflects the unity of their objects of study and the sympathetic connection of all things.¹

The dialogue is the form Plato chose in order to convey reality as a whole and it mirrors the different levels of the universe.² I propose to understand cinema as another way of expressing the unity of the Platonic cosmos in terms of Plotinian contemplation. In this sense, I do not merely consider cinema as a mirror of the external cosmos, but also as an *introversive* mirror of the soul (*psyche*) and the intellect (*nous*) reflecting the light of the One (or Good). The contemplation of the cosmos is conducive to the rediscovery of the soul, which can be depicted as the creative energy sustaining the universe (III 8, 5, 10–15). Our ordinary experience shows us an external world associated with the experience of our own body. Platonism proposes a “protreptic” call for a change of perspective: we are not in the body, it is our body that is within our soul’s energy. At the cosmic level, Plotinus, following Plato’s *Timaeus* (36d9–e1), regarded the physical universe as located within the World-Soul, which surrounds and permeates everything (III 9, 3).³ The beauty of the world proceeds from an inner beauty present in Nature as a forming principle (*logos*); and Nature’s creativity depends on the innermost beauty of the Soul, whose *logos* is “more beautiful than that in Nature, and is also the source of that in Nature” (v 8, 3, 1–3). The beauty present in the Soul is like a light coming from a higher light (v 8, 3, 6).⁴ That light flashes (*astraptein*) in the Soul and produces Nature “like light from fire” (v 9, 6, 22), as a lower mode of the soul, the generative soul. It is an imitation (v 8, 1, 32) and appearance (*indalma* v 9, 6, 19) of the higher Soul, always illumined and in contact with Intellect.⁵

The contemplation of the objective world, contained within the soul, therefore leads us to a “subjective” inner space:

Nature which produces such beautiful works is far before them in beauty, but we, because we are not accustomed to see any of the things within

1 All parts of the universe are connected to each other sharing a common “vibration” like musical strings resounding in sympathy: see Plotinus, IV 4, 41 (cf. III 2, 2, 4–6 and III 2, 3, 10). Platonic dialectic sees the universe as a whole (*synopsis*) and pays attention to the connections between disciplines and in the totality of what there is (*Rep.* 537c; cf. I 3, 4–5).

2 “The dialogue is a cosmos and the cosmos is a dialogue,” see Anon. *Proleg. Plat. Phil.* 16, 3, Westerink 1962, 3–55.

3 Cf. Caluori 2015, 180 ff. The interpenetration of intelligible realities is also mentioned in v 8, 4, 6.

4 In a similar way, the Sun in the divine realm is the Intellect and thanks to the mediation of the soul the sensible sun connects with the intelligible (IV 3, 11, 14).

5 About the derivation of nature from soul see also III 8, 4, 15.

and do not know them, pursue the external and do not know that it is that within which moves us: as if someone looking at his image and not knowing where it came from should pursue it. (v 8, 2, 31–35).

Nature's contemplation is a derivative kind of self-awareness (*synaisthêsis*, cf. III 8, 4, 19) that produces, in its unification of the objective and the subjective, a spectacle full of splendor and grace (8, 4, 22). However, it possesses a derivative mode of being because it is a contemplation that is a feeble image or shadow (*eidôlon*) of another higher contemplation, which is more clairvoyant (*enarg-estera*, 8, 4, 28): the vision of the Soul.

At the human level, action derives from contemplation, and it is either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation, and when men “make something, then, it is because they want to see their object themselves and also because they want others to be aware of it and contemplate it” (III 8, 4, 31–40).

For Plotinus, this longing for contemplation would be the cause of cinema's attractiveness for us, because it offers a contemplative space where the audience can be imaginatively aware of the inner side of the shadows (*eidôla*, cf. I 7, 2, 5). They can be reconnected, as *eikones* (images), with their more substantial models (*paradeigmata*, cf. I 2, 7, 1), thanks to the introspective turning of the soul's vision (*orasis*) towards Intellect. The inner space and the darkness of the theatre allows the audience to go beyond even the cosmic paradigms of the objective/external world and in a change of perspective, see the light of the One that reverberates (visually and sonically) on the paradigms of the Intellect and the external world thanks to the Soul that reflects that same intelligible light.⁶

The soul's love for that light goes beyond the paradigms and expands in the obscuration of the external forms. Instead of leading only to the Intellect, the principle which is “eminently all things,” this love goes towards the source of light in the One, which is “virtually all things” (v 3, 15, 26–33). The One is all things in the sense that is present to them as an inner living “trace.”⁷ A cinema capable of doing that can be considered contemplative because it awakens the soul's awareness of the presence not only of the light of the Intelligible but also of the supra-intelligible light of the One.

For Plotinus, Being is Light because the realm of the Intellect (*Nous*) and the Intelligibles correspond to the irradiation of the First Principle of all, the One. Plotinus' views are relevant to studying the aesthetic implications of a metaphysics of light in the context of cinema studies because the medium of

6 On the notion of irradiation (*perilampsis*) of the intelligible light as radii emanating from a central source see VI 5, 5, 1; 8, 9 and v 1, 6, 26–9.

7 Gerson 2013, 213; 235; 237; 239–242. On the notion of “trace” see below, p. 109.

this artistic manifestation itself consists of light. The irradiation of reality unfolds for Plotinus through different degrees of Being: the source of Being and Existence lies in the Hypostasis of the One-Good beyond being, comparable to the center of irradiation (IV 4, 16, 21; IV 3, 17, 12).⁸ It is followed by the Intellect, compared to the light that comes from the Sun (V 1, 7, 1). The Intellect is the source of Form and Essence for everything else, and in its vision of the One, which is “saturated” with Light and Being (V 1, 7, 35; VI 7, 16), is produced the multiplicity of the Intelligible Realm. Through its fullness springs forth the third Hypostasis, the Soul. The Soul, in turn, transmits its inner Light and Life to the sensible world (VI 5, 30; V 3, 8, 24).⁹

Plotinus depicts this metaphysical movement as a process combining analogy and gradation. The *Nous* is the source of Light for the Soul; and in an analogous way, the One is the source of Light for the One (VI 7, 17, 36). The gradation corresponds to levels of unification or “degrees of organizational complexity” in the reception of the illumination of the principles (because each receives according to its capacity).¹⁰ In this process of unfolding, the *Logos*, the principle of expression of the Intellect within the Soul, receives the Intelligible like a reflection in a mirror (IV 3, 30, 5).

The hypostasis Soul originates succession but maintains a higher degree of unity than particular souls because it is established around the Intelligible. This is due to constant contemplation and receptivity towards the illumination of the Intellect, by which it becomes intellectual. Hence, a contemplative cinema can help the individual soul in its *epistrophê* and turn around its vision from its fragmented existence. Instead of identifying with the illusory images of the divisible realm, the soul can identify momentarily with an intense iconic and poetic experience. This produces a change in the self-awareness of the audience, who realizes that higher images and traces (those which are intellectual, self-reflexive, and full of beauty, life, and truth) are more real than the vanity and egotism of real life striving after shadows and simulacra.¹¹

8 On the analogy of center-radii and *perilampusis* see the Plotinian passages quoted in note 6 above. Cf. also VI 8, 18, 7. The divine ray of the Sun symbolizes the “connective” nature of the soul. Particular souls are reconnected to their source by becoming like rays of light (*bolai*, cf. VI 4, 3, 3) or radii returning to the center (cf. I 7, 1, 24), in a contemplative reorientation towards the One.

9 For recent studies on Plotinus’ metaphysics, see Gerson 1994 and Corrigan 2005. See Corrigan 2005, 150, for a summary of Plotinus’s depiction of the radiation from the One.

10 See Corrigan 1999, 109; Corrigan refers to VI 9, 1, 27–8 where Plotinus implies that “degrees of unity give rise to degrees of being.” For the doctrine of reception according to the capacity of the receiver, see IV 8, 6, 16–18; VI 4, 3, 10 and Armstrong 1940, 60.

11 On the distinction between souls or types of soul (Soul as hypostasis, World-Soul and individual souls) see V 9, 14, 20; IV 3, 1–2; IV 8, 2.

Platonism had an ambiguous relationship with images; things are images, that is, a projection of higher principles, which means that images possess a lesser degree of being than the Forms (images reflected in mirrors or lakes have an illusory status); but on the other hand, images contain a trace (*ichnos*, cf. Plotinus, VI 6, 18, 48; VI 7, 18, 3; VI 7, 23, 2; VI 7, 33, 30; I 8, 11, 17; VI 4, 15, 15) by which they remain connected, thanks to similarity, with the principle that produced them. However, these traces at the level of the soul and the sensible world, have an intermediate nature and fluctuate between opposites (IV 4, 18, 30): between insubstantial shadows and the return to a more real light and a higher degree of being.

For Plotinus, cinema would contain such ambiguity too; because it can lead to mere illusion or, on the contrary, it can make possible an experience beyond our ordinary relationship with images, creating a contemplative ambience in which we can discover that living connection between the “trace” and its illuminating source (as if it were through the “ray” of projection, like an Ariadne’s thread back to that inner light that frees the soul from the Labyrinth of common life, cf. Olypiodorus, *In Gorgiam* 44, 5).¹²

Bodies have a trace of the soul (beauty in bodies is an image, a trace and a shadow: I 6, 8, 7). Using the language of the mysteries, Plotinus says that in order to find the source of Beauty, the soul must turn inward (*endon en agiois ierois*) instead of turning outward towards the splendor (I 6, 8, 1–5) present in bodies.¹³ In the next stage, the soul is also explained as consisting of a tension between a higher soul and a lower soul; the latter is conceived as an image, which has a trace (a presence) of the former, the “undescended” soul always turned towards *nous* (Intellect).¹⁴ The *Nous*, as the level of true Being is a trace of the One, as well (V 5, 5, 11) and this primary Being proceeded “a little way from the One, but did not wish to go still further, but turned inwards and took its stand there, and became substance (*ousia*) and hearth (*hestia*) of all things.” After this Plotinus says that the sound of the names of these concepts imitate (V 5, 5, 22) the real nature of the intelligible “birth-pangs” of the generation of Being. Sounds (the voice that expresses the primordality of Being) and images (the symbol of the hearth of reality: Hestia, etc.) are traces intrinsically connected with the One as principle of Being. In turn, soul and life are traces (*ichnê*) of the intellect (VI 7, 20, 13). Plotinus distinguishes one “light” that

12 In later Neoplatonic theurgy, these “traces” or “vestiges” of the One and the Intellect are depicted as “*synthêmata*” or “*symbola*,” especially in relation to the *Chaldean Oracles* and Orphic symbolism and mythical expression of metaphysical/theological notions, in Iamblichus, Proclus, etc.

13 There is a reference to inner beauty (*endon kalous*) in I 6, 5, 6. Cf. also Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c6.

14 Cf. IV 8, 4, 30; 8, 1; IV 3, 12, 4; IV 7, 13, 12.

makes things be what they are (the light of the Intellect) and another higher reverberance or splendour: the light of the One/Good that makes things “alive” and blooming, coloring them with a grace (*charis*, 22, 7) that is like a warmth proper to the trace of the One (23, 2), which is that what attracts the soul. For Plotinus, the warm light of the One, not just the light of Being, is the source of the love and ecstasy of the soul: “The beauty of the Intellect is inactive till it catches a light from the Good” (22, 11).

For Plotinus the soul occupies a “boundary” region or intermediary position between the intelligible and the sensible (e.g. IV 8, 7, 5; cf. IV 2, 1, 45), in which all aspects of reality appear like reflections in a mirror, located in the line of the horizon or “frontier” (*eschatos*, cf. IV 4, 2, 17) where intelligible “space” begins, mentioned by Plato in the myth of the *Phaedrus* (247 b-c).¹⁵ The head of the “charioteer” portrayed in Plato and Plotinus represents that part of the soul oriented upwards to the intellect (IV 8, 8, 11), which is established and fixed above the heavens (IV 3, 12, 5) in the contemplation of Being (IV 8, 7, 24). For the “World-Soul” it is possible to stay always suspended from the intelligible and to observe the secondary beings that follow it in a contemplative manner without being disturbed. But the partial souls descend into the world as if it were into a “cave” (IV 8, 1, 33; 3, 4; 4, 29).

The fragmentation and descent of the soul into the realm of interval, extension and illusion, etc., proper to the material world, was explained with the myth of Dionysos’ mirror, mentioned by Plotinus at IV 3, 12, applying a metaphysics of “mirroring” and “projection.”¹⁶ Matter is a mirror (e.g. III 6, 13, 35) in the sense that it is that which is responsible for the diminished being of composite realities (and divisiveness), while forms (*logoi* in Nature and in the Soul, and Forms in the Intellect) are the cause of essence, beauty and true being.¹⁷ Another feature of matter, according to Plotinus, is that it can be compared to a medium or screen (following Plato’s notion of the receptacle in the *Timaeus* 49a5)—as a substratum of everything—on which the images of the Intelligible are projected.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the screen of matter is opaque (II 4, 5, 7);

15 Cf. also the depiction of the heaven as smooth (*leios*) in Plato, *Timaeus* 34b; and Proclus, *In Tim.* II 80, 18, who connects the smoothness of the heaven with the myth of the mirror of Dionysos. The notion of “frontier” is also depicted artistically in Western films and the “Hestia” of being with its cohesive/contemplative power appears represented in typical “campfire” scenes in Westerns.

16 See Pepin 1970 and Wildberg 2011, 228 ff.

17 See Gerson 1994, 112 ff. for a summary on Plotinus’ views on matter and the metaphor of the mirror.

18 Since matter is identified with pure potency and unqualified privation of form, it cannot be actualized by receiving completely a form, if it should continue to be virtually all things. See Gerson 2013, 250.

it “participates by not participating” and although it receives something from Being —only because of its vicinity—, the Soul’s illumination does not penetrate into it, as if it were an echo that bounces back (III 6, 14, 21). Both soul and matter are thus “images” or “mirrors,” with the difference that matter is the image of an image (III 9, 3, 10 ff.) and the soul is able to turn again towards the source of her image, but matter is deprived of that reverting capability.

Since matter is absolute sterility (and “Poverty,” III 6, 14, 9; I 8, 5, 8; I 8, 14, 35; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 203b-c) it would be better for the soul to remain in its separate place instead of residing in matter or placing itself in matter as a substratum (I 8, 14, 32). However, matter begs and wants to come right inside (*to eisô*):

“All the place is holy” (*hieros*), and there is nothing which is without a share of soul. So matter spreads itself out under soul and is illumined, and cannot grasp the source from which its light comes [...] Matter darkens the illumination, the light from that source, by mixture with itself, and weakens it by itself offering it the opportunity of generation and the reason for coming to matter; for it would have not come to what was not present (I 8, 14, 34).

The soul is enchanted with that which is external to it, and resulting from its own projection into the falsity of the screen of matter.¹⁹ Thus, it needs to recover the inner, holy space, which it has abandoned, pursuing illusory phantoms with no independent reality. Matter, being absolutely deficient, distracts the soul from its true being and its self-love, which of course is not egotism (because it corresponds to a universal “self” that leads to transcendence).²⁰ The Good, source of all being, is love and self-love and is undiminished in its self-giving. Therefore, the loving orientation of the soul towards true reality is that of the return to the Good.²¹ The soul already contains the Good within itself, both thanks to the illumination of the Good and through the illumination of the Intellect (being in turn an image of the Good).

An art like cinema has an ambiguous power: it can merely be another expression of the false magic of matter, the darkness of the theatre being merely analogous to the opaqueness of the mirror of matter and another kind of the opium of the people; or on the other hand, its darkness prepares for the

19 See p. 6 above (and I 6, 8 1–5) about the importance of the contemplation of beauty for the return to the inner space of the soul.

20 Plotinus uses the pronoun “we” to express the universality of the true self connected to the Intelligible (cf. VI 4, 14, 16; I 1, 7, 6).

21 Gerson 2013, 281–282. On the Good’s undiminished self-giving, see Corrigan 2005, 121–122.

attentive reception of illumination/projection of the Intelligible, and can become and symbolize that transcendent space of the soul (similar to the openness of the mirror of divine/intelligible matter),²² which is dark in another sense. Because of its invisibility and sacredness it is an occasion for inspiring the magic of love that helps the soul in its attempt to turn the inner eye towards a more essential and beautiful reality.

2 Cinema as Mystic Mirror and *Prothyron* for the Contemplative Return to the *Adyton* and *Myêsis*

The outward and visible nature is, for Plotinus, a source of enchantment (*goê-teia*), which distracts the soul from its self-knowledge (IV 4, 44, 1), because material things are just simulacra (*eidôla*), that is, shadows of a higher substantial reality.²³ However, Eros, in terms of the Platonic love depicted in the *Symposium* (203d8), is also a magician, and a source of another mode of enchantment: that of beauty. It is the kind of magic that leads us from sensible reality to the Good.

Entering into a cavern that represents the “cosmic cave,”²⁴ or in our case a cinema theatre, allows our faculties to use the same power of enchantment of images and to transform “fancy” (according to Coleridge’s terms) into a higher “creative imagination” that reveals the Forms;²⁵ thus the cave becomes populated by divine statues instead of the phantoms of fancy. And later even the statues near the innermost space, now in silence, point towards the source of form and being (cf. V 1, 6, 12).²⁶ Images and statues are enigmatic signs that lead to a deeper meaning when left behind after turning towards to the innermost

22 Cf. II 4, 4, 15; 5, 14 There is a difference between the lower phase of the soul inclining (falling) towards the peripheral falsity of reality and producing matter, and the production of the multiplicity of Forms within the Intellect according to which divine matter is a receptive substratum which turning towards the One produces true Being, not because of lacking but because of superabundance (V 2, 5, 1). The matter of the sensible world is opaque and lifeless (II 4, 5, 7–20), intelligible matter on the other hand is intellective and has life.

23 Cf. IV 4, 40, 6–7: “the Universe is the primary wizard and enchanter.”

24 See Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum* 4 (Section 9.1): for the “theologians” mentioned by Porphyry the initiatic cave is both the symbol of the sensible world (because it is dark, stony and humid) and of the Intelligible world (because it is invisible and stable).

25 Cf. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 304–305. See Allen 1996, 75 ff. and Newlyn 1985, 124.

26 This is related to the exhortation to work on the inner self as working on our own statue (I 6, 9, 13).

light of the *adyton* (holy of holies or the sanctuary in a temple) of the Good (VI 9, 11, 16; I 6, 7, 5).

Platonic philosophy is based on that change of perspective (Plato, *Rep.* 518c). The “reversion” corresponds to the awakening or reactivation of the inner divine spark (or the “eye of the soul”), thanks to turning the vehicle (Plato implies the turning of the whole body) where the eye and its sight is dwelling, towards the light of the Good and true reality (outside the cave; interpreted as “*epistrophê*” to the Intelligible Realm in Plotinus, IV 8, 1, 33; I 6, 8, etc.).²⁷

The inner, invisible aspect of things is like the *adyton* of the temple, which is also invisible (VI 9, 11, 30), and correspondingly, a place where there is no visibility, such as a “cave,” presents the ambiguity between the opaqueness of matter—and its silence (conceived in a privative sense)—and the “darkness” of the fullness of Being. For this kind of space can evoke the invisible energy of the soul and the intellect that supports everything in a different kind of silence and tranquility.

The soul resides on the “threshold” of the Intelligible (V 1, 10, 17). Therefore, the soul is like a door, and the place of encounter between the physical and the spiritual. The soul is that which makes transparent the visible and allows the contemplation of the reality beyond the veil of the opaqueness of matter. Although the world is for the particular souls like a “cave” (IV 8, 3, 4), the cave has a double meaning: as has just been mentioned, it can be a place of obscurity and distraction within its shadows, and simulacra and images and should be avoided (III 4, 2, 12). Or simultaneously, this place can propose a return to interiority, similar to the prophetic cave or *adyton* of Night mentioned in the Orphic *Rhapsodies* (OF 104, 105, 107, 164–6, cf. Derveni papyrus Col. XI, 1–3). Zeus retreated into a cave in a meditative state before ordering the cosmos, and he learnt from the ancient goddess of Night that to maintain the unity of the world he needed to surround everything with diaphanous aether (West 1983: 71–72).

For Plotinus (I 6, 6–9; VI 9, 11), this process entails a return to the self and is compared to the celebration of the Mysteries, especially to the ritual of entering naked and in silence into the *adyton*, while laying aside all things (garments). In a passage of the *Symposium* (210a1), Plato uses the verb *myeô* (*myêtheiês*), which means “to initiate into the mysteries,” to refer to Diotima’s initiations and revelations (*ta telea kai epoptika*). These are also terms proper to the Ancient Mysteries, where the cave symbolizes the rebirth into a new

27 Plato uses the words: *strephein*, *metastrephô* and *periagôgê* from darkness to light. For Plotinus also the hypostatic intellect receives order and form at the stage of “reversion” from indetermination and obscurity towards the One’s light (II 4, 5, 35).

life and self-transformation. One can compare, to an extent, the experience of entering a cinema theatre, to that experience of leaving aside the external/profane experience. Here one has a different kind of connection with the self, different capabilities that are not developed in ordinary life are awakened. This is possible thanks to a process of “*myésis*,” which is etymologically connected to the verb *myô*: “to close the eyes” (or mouth), understood in terms of awakening the eye of the soul and turning it from derived, non-substantial reality towards the Intelligible. Plotinus refers to “*myésis*” at I 6, 7, 8, speaking of an inner vision experienced with “closed eyes.”

The notion of abandoning the superfluous (entering naked into the *adyton*) is related to the idea of preparing the recipient while turning to the source of illumination (and true being). For Plotinus each reality becomes what it is in its “turning towards” to its source (V 2, 1, 9–12). Therefore, if the recipient, who is turned towards the higher cause (mirror or crater), is emptied (thanks to “*katharsis*”) and untroubled (like a lake) then it is well prepared for being informed and vitalized. This “turning reception” is not passive, which is important especially on the human level. The part according to which we are “active” is the one that turns to the higher level and thus corresponds to our “choice” of a mode of life (III 4, 3, 5–9). Cinema presents us with different paradigms or models of life—together with the musical *mimêsis* of their voices or inner emotions, expressed through the proper musical “*êthos*” of the scene (cf. Pelosi 2010: 36). For Plotinus, our being depends on the part of the soul where we put our activity or “energy” (*energeia*), and when that activity is directed towards the object of contemplation, we become that by “being formed according to what one sees” (IV 4, 2, 5); and also the soul “is and becomes what it remembers” (IV 4, 3, 7). Thus, cinema can help us in the contemplative recollection of our living energy around intellectual activity.

But how are Ancient “mysteries” related to modern cinema? One could say that the cinematic experience can be compared to a process of closing the physical eyes, mouth and ears to ordinary existence (in a cinema theatre, where the audience contemplates in attentive silence and with the lights turned out), in order to have an intuition or insight of the mystery of beauty.²⁸ This kind of experience refines our sensitivity for deeper, more universal, true feelings, in

28 Wagner thought that the stage should be “consecrated” and that the theatrical experience should transform the audience. It is obvious for us that in order to watch a movie one has to do it in a dark place, but that would not have been so natural for an audience without Wagner’s idea for a modern theatrical/operatic experience; he was the first who turned the lights of the theatre auditorium off, conscious of the need of a non-ordinary, silent and nocturnal (almost mystical) ambience to appreciate the operas without distractions.

an instantaneous vision, according to which the observer also loses the notion of external time and succession, and becomes contained in a different kind of “space.” All this happens thanks to artistic “succession” in terms of rhythm and the cohesive/containing power of beauty. Orpheus, was not only a legendary musician, he was also the founder of the Mysteries. Orphism explained the common origin of all souls with the mystical participation in a Dionysian spark of life, after the dismemberment of the god; this is a theme Plotinus associated with the notion of the souls’ “sisterhood” with the World-Soul (IV 3, 6, 10–14 and II 9, 18, 15–24).

The figure of Orpheus illustrates the power of poetry and music as well as other intuitive languages (we can include cinema) intended to lead back the human mind to intuition and union with a deeper invisible dimension of reality. Cocteau, in his trilogy of films that rework the Orphic myth, reflects on the intermediary role of art and poetry, identified with the World-Soul. The famous mirror/portal scene of the film *Orphée* (1950) can be seen as portraying the “mirror of Dionysos” mentioned above (IV 3, 12). The place that can be “accessed” in the imagination, through this film is a “legendary” place. In Cocteau’s words, “a legend is entitled to be beyond time and place.”

Cocteau’s *Orphée* combines visually the different meanings of the Orphic mirror. Firstly, it is a “portal” to a deeper reality (expressed in the language of dreams). Secondly, the openness of the passage depends on the flexibility of the mirror. If the mirror were rigid and opaque like the mirror of matter that is not able to actively “return” to its causes, we could not enter into the realm of the Soul. If we identify ourselves with the penetrating and liquid power of poetry and music, on the other hand, we can turn the mirror towards the source of life and pass through. It is also noticeable that Orpheus (played by Jean Marais) awakes after the first mirror scene in another place with his face resting on a horizontal mirror on the ground that looks like the segment of a lake.

The Orphic “Krater” was a very important symbol connected in Neoplatonism with the receptacle or vessel in which the World-Soul is composed in Plato’s *Timaeus* (35a; 41d; cf. Plotinus, IV 3, 7, 10; V 1, 8, 6). And as Kingsley points out, it can also be interpreted as a crater in the earth, containing a reflecting lake connecting the worlds and related to an underground crater and lake in the legend of Orpheus, where an Oracle of Apollo and the Night, source of dreams, was located.²⁹

See Monaghan 2013, 245, who points out the Platonic and philosophical implications of Wagner’s turning the lights off in the theatre.

29 See Kingsley 1995, 135–136. Plato also related the symbol of the mirror to the notion of divination and imagination, cf. Sheppard 2003.

I cannot go into details here and elaborate all the implications of the notion of cinema as mirror, window or portal of dreams, but I can mention several examples: Truffaut's *L'Amour en Fuite* (*Love on the Run*, 1979), where the characters speak while looking at a mirror that has a rectangular form, like a cinema screen, and share their most sincere emotions between them and about life; and a scene with the same character (Antoine Doinel), who is also talking to a mirror in Truffaut's *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968).³⁰ Another example, this time with reference to the topic of the portal, is the famous sequence of John Wayne in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), opening the door leading onto the landscape of Monument Valley (it is also important that the action of Westerns is usually placed in the "border").³¹

The already mentioned concept of the "threshold" (*prothyron*)—significant in the context of the Neoplatonic exegesis of *Philebus* 64c—concerns the notion of a space of truth, beauty, and symmetry, which leads to the Good and is relevant for our suggestion that cinema can be a visionary art preparing the kind of space full of the light of the One.³²

The legendary figure of John Wayne standing on the threshold in *The Searchers* represents the intermediary space between two worlds that makes possible for the audience to go beyond ordinary experience and participate in an imaginary scenario, the otherness of the hinterland. We have to leave behind the comfort of our own world, to which we are accustomed (including the negative emotions of hatred, bitterness and racial prejudices, in the case of Wayne's character, Ethan Edwards) and follow an existential path of transformation, going out towards self-knowledge (to revalue our interiority). The film's journey begins, with the contrast between the darkness of the room and the light framed by the door, inviting us to cross the threshold, and ends returning to it in the closing scene.³³ John Wayne standing alone in the

30 See "Cinema as Mirror, Face and Close up," in Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, 63 ff.

31 The idea of cinema as a window appears clearly in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), cf. "Cinema as Window and Frame," in Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, 14 ff.). Borges (1989) related poetry and art to the gates or portals through which the dreams enter in Homer (*Odyssey*, 19.560–567) and in Virgil (*Aeneid*, 6.893–96). See Miller 1994, 15ff and 26, for a discussion of the Homeric metaphor.

32 The Intellect is at the threshold of the One (v 9, 2, 25) and announces its Silence, says Plotinus following Plato's *Philebus*, 64c1 (three monads on the vestibule or porch of the dwelling of the Good: Truth, Beauty; and Symmetry, cf. 66.15; 69.13). It can also be said that the Soul, being at the threshold of the two worlds, announces/unfolds the unitary and undivided Intellect (cf. Proclus, *In Eucl.* 5, 2–3).

33 "Cinema as Door, Screen and Threshold," in Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, 39 ff.: "the motif of entering and leaving, of traversing and crossing,—because crossing a threshold always implies leaving a space and entering another—is central to *The Searchers*."

doorway and then walking away to the world of imagination, can function as a visible symbol of the soul as bridge between the two shores of reality: the realm of illusory shadows and the realm of true being and substantial light. The inner space—the audience's own experience of interiority—is recovered and transformed thanks to the mediation of the Soul's light (the film's light) and the identification with the path of self-transformation of the characters.

Cinema, compared to a door and other intermediary spaces that connect two shores, can symbolize the connecting levels between different levels of reality, such as rivers that need to be traversed when entering or leaving those levels; for example, the scene in Peter Jackson's film (2001) that corresponds to Chapter 8 of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (Book II, "Farewell to Lorien"). The character of Galadriel, who also is an interpreter of a prophetic mirror, is seen in a swan-shaped boat, and she also plays a stringed instrument, a harp, which accompanies elvish songs (in the book, which is more Neoplatonic than the film, the symbolism of the swan-boat and the light of the star—the Silmaril that carries Eärendil in that vehicle, is still more explicit as a representation of the communication of beneficial influence between transcendent reality and the manifested world).

The symbol of the swan, the bird of Apollo, appears in legends related to Orpheus and Plato (*Rep.* 620a and in the dream of Socrates, in Apuleius, *De Platone* 1), and it is well known that there are thresholds and doors decorated in the form of swan feathers; since they swim in the calm surface of lakes, they are white and impassible (the sensible world does not affect them). They represent the World-Soul or the Logos.³⁴

I propose to understand cinema as another manifestation of "the door of the Soul" and the heart of reality (the undivided heart of Dionysos, which represents the immanent intellect).³⁵ Then the question, proper to cinema and narratology studies, "who speaks in a film as a narrative?" or "who is the narrator?" can be answered like this: it is the voice of the World-Soul through the poet/filmmaker, who presents an intermediary—mirror-like—way, that is, a

34 The ballet *Swan Lake* (Tchaikovsky) and the Opera *Lohengrin* (Wagner), also connect the swan with a magical world, or intermediary beings. In Nordic cultures (and also in Celtic Ireland) the swan is related to the harp as a ladder between worlds.

35 See OF 199, 209–11; Proclus, *In Tim.* II, 145, 18; 197, 15–30; *In Crat.* 180, 1; 100, 27 and *In Alc.* 54–5 (83). The heart was in the myth of the dismemberment of Dionysos the only part left untouched by the Titans and it was later saved by Athena. All the fragments of the god were reunited and restored from the heart, thanks to Apollo's medicine, including the fragments present in human souls: the Dionysian spark or *nous*, which is therefore the source of the re-integration and harmony of human nature.

reflection proposed to return to a deeper sense of life, deeper than ordinary life outside the cinema theatre.³⁶

The world-soul is the primordial artist, prior to nature. She transforms herself into a spectacle (*theama*) and produces a new spectacle in its superabundance of being and light (III. 8.5).³⁷

Conclusion: Contemplative Cinema

In this chapter I have been interested in highlighting the positive aspect of images or “traces” in cinema not as a source of deceptive illusions, but understood as a way of experiencing the “mysterious” side of reality according to which, in terms of Plotinus’ psychology, souls awake their inner vision (I 6, 9), energy and awareness of the connectedness and unity of all things (IV 4, 45, 1–9). Cinema can become an interiorizing mode of expression through its combination of legend, myth, magic, enchantment. It can become so also through its particular cinematic language because one does not merely talk about film but one has to experience it, through images and sounds that reach beyond words.

There is a tension between the sympathetic connection of the cosmos presented in the soul’s inner contemplation and the external divisiveness of our experience in the sensible/external world on our profit-making focused societies. In the contemporary world, utilitarian action is valued more than contemplation. Hence those spectacles in which agitated external action predominates—such as sports events (and their divisive nature, that is, one team against the other), or also films with fast action, noisy special effects and loud and deep bass sounds (appealing the egotistic *epithymetikon*)—are more positively valued than unitive and contemplative arts. Plato, in his *Gorgias* (485e; 506b), opposes two ways of life: the sophistic and the philosophical, illustrating them with the contrast between Zethus, the mythical model of the active man, warrior and athlete, and Amphion, the poet and musician, who represents the artistic and contemplative way of life.

This is one of the themes of *Lost Horizon* (1937, Frank Capra), the film from which I took the epigraph. I wanted to show with this example that cinema is

36 On the cinematic narrator see Gaudreault 2009.

37 The contemplation of the spectacle of the intelligible is related to the vision of the souls led by (and in love with) Zeus in the myth of the *Phaedrus*, see v 8, 10. This kind of vision produces an intimate understanding and awareness of the self (II, 20: *synesis* and *synaisthêsis*) proper to the identification between subject-object.

able to express a change of perspective, from the outward to the inner/contemplative mode of life, thanks to the contrast between external and internal spaces, not merely in spatial terms, but also according to a transformative and metaphysical “conversion” from *thorybos* (noise, agitation, fragmentation) to stillness, harmony and contemplation.³⁸ *Lost Horizon*, is a utopian and anti-war film (an ideal of brotherhood vs. the ambience of war and financial crisis typical of those times), which can be seen as an allegory for the relationship between the active life and the contemplative life; and as a quest for the “intelligible” peace of Shangri-La in a troubled (*thorybôdês*) world. In a similar way, Plotinus proposes a journey and search for the tranquility proper to the person turned to the inner space of unity (III 8, 6, 40: *pros to hen kai pros to hesychon*). This peace is not only of things outside but in relation to ourselves, because when we reach it, “all is within us.” The integration of the soul corresponds to its innermost essence, the appropriation of its nature (*oikeiosis*; cf. *Enn.* VI 7, 27, 19), its inner Hestia (*hearth*) or home (cf. V 5, 5, 15).

The quotation of *Lost Horizon* in the epigraph can be understood as an illustration of the connection between the particular soul (the soul-image or shade: *eidôlon*) and the undescended soul (as an *eikôn* of the Intellect, cf. V 3, 4, 21) in Plotinus, especially because its context is a romantic love scene, where love itself reveals the union of two souls: the man of action in the Consular Service, Robert Conway (Ronald Colman) and the contemplative and artistic Sondra Bizet (Jane Wyatt). In the film, other characters, taken against their will, together with Conway to the mythical place Shangri-La, are suspicious of it and find the place “too mysterious,” while Conway, from the beginning adopts a more open attitude, with a sense of philosophical curiosity; marveled and enchanted by the experience, because he already has an intellectual tendency to contemplation (especially in the depiction of the character in Hilton’s novel). He already feels an intimate bond of familiarity with the beauty of the place and especially with Sondra, and in the film asks her: why? Sondra answers: “Perhaps because you’ve always been a part of Shangri-La without knowing it.”

Similarly, for Plotinus, our souls are unaware of their being present at the undescended level and of the corresponding presence of the contemplative wisdom of the higher noetic soul within ourselves. The landing of the plane into the arms of the shadow (a metaphorical descent) can represent that presence and communication with the highest part of the soul, with which we are

38 For Plotinus the trouble or tumult of the world and its fragmenting effect on the soul, is represented with the word “*thorybos*” (e.g. I 1, 9, 25 and III 4, 6, 6), following Plato, *Tim.* 42d; 43b; 70e.

always in contact, though unconsciously, because it is suspended from *Nous* and the One.

Plotinus establishes a contrast between the shadow or external image (*skia* or *eidôlon*) of the soul and the illuminating inner or higher self, and commenting on Plato's *Republic* (611e–612a), he proposes a return to the “ancient nature” of the soul (VI 9, 8, 14), the true original “light” that produces the shade. According to its nature, the soul is a circle because it depends on a circular principle (the *Nous*), and if it looks in the direction towards the center, she attaches (*synapto*) its own center to the Centre of all things, the One (VI 9, 8, 19–20). The center corresponds to that light which is not “submerged” in the sensible realm. On the other hand, the “shadow” is “another soul,” it is the image of the soul that descends when the higher soul leans forward (*neusis*) (I 1, 12, 20; III 2, 15, 43 ff.).³⁹ When we identify ourselves with the derived image and with all kinds of things attached to our essential nature from the “outer” side of the circle of the soul, we become compound beings and our nature resembles that of the sea god Glaucus (Plato, *Rep*, X 611, cf. I 1, 12, 14). Since we consider the external attachments and aggregates to be our real self, we need an extraordinary experience—the cinematic experience of beauty—for turning our consciousness (*synaisthêsis*) back to our inner self. The notions of “*myêsis*” and “mystery” studied in this chapter in comparison with the cinematic experience, express the search for the true essence of the soul, while abandoning the profane space and entering into the enchanted *adyton* or the cinema theatre in order to have an “extraordinary” experience within a new contemplative space.⁴⁰ This process supposes entering a dark theatre and letting go the attachment to the world of senses, which means to pass beyond the peripheral thanks to a kind of “*katharsis*.” In order to do that, the soul—like Odysseus tied to the mast and passing beyond the Sirens—needs to attach (*haptô*, used by Plato, or *ephaptô*, used by Plotinus, I 1, 12, 17) itself not to external accessories but to inner metaphysical principles to which the soul is related by kinship (*syngeneia*).

Contemplative cinema can be a valuable catalyst for “turning” (*epistrophê*) the “eye of the soul” to the Intelligible realm (cf. Plato's *Republic*, Plotinus, I 6, 9, 25). This kind of cinema is understood as turning away from the ordinary towards the enchanted and extraordinary. And even in its humble simplicity as “entertainment” it can be a contribution to the kind of contemplation that,

39 See I 1, 12, 35, since Heracles was an “active man,” a part of him, his shadow, is in Hades.

40 The mysteries provided people with an experience that combined enactments, words, music, images and dance in an extraordinary place that leads the soul's *pathos*, through shocking experiences to a lasting *eupathein* or joy and freedom of the soul. See Burkert 1987, 89 ff.

according to Plotinus, leads to the transcendent simplicity of the One (IV 4, 2, 3–8). In contemplation we identify ourselves with the contemplated object (I 6, 9, 28), as when watching a film, we become engaged and identified with the characters, in the whole experience of watching their expressions and actions, and also thanks to the soundtrack that express their inward emotions.⁴¹

Lost Horizon, like many films, is the narrative of a journey of transformation, leading beyond form and the mere mental identification with concepts in favor of an assimilation to the contemplated object. This leading beyond external shadows and images towards the paradigms and the light of the One shining on them—which are metaphorically both “within,” “higher” and “beyond”—is a journey (*poreia*) and “upward path” (*anagôgê*, cf. I 3, 1) and requires a training and a change of orientation of our life experience, developing the vision of the inner eye, not of the outer eye (cf. I 6, 9, 1; VI 9, 10, 1).

Modern philosophy proceeds from critical reason while Plotinian metaphysics proceeds from *Nous* as intuition or vision beyond words; a vision that leads to an even more transcendent or ineffable experience. Cinema can also point towards that transcendent reality. By proposing an imaginative experience, it can stir the love of the soul for that beauty which is beyond being. Cinema, as an art that in its visual and sonic languages transcends words, can have a mystical and visionary meaning. As we have mentioned above, from Plotinus point of view, cinema can produce virtually two effects: on the one hand it can be a distraction made of illusory images; on the other, those same images can function as tokens and *ainigmata* (VI 9, 11, 28) stirring our intellectual and affective search for a substantial life, essential reality and its unity.

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41 Plotinus explains his understanding of “contemplation” in v 8, 9–10 as a way of unification proper to the identification between the seer and the object seen (10, 40; cf. also VI 9, 10, 12–16). See Hadot 1993, 32, for the relationship between the real self, contemplation and simplicity.

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Moving Image and Conversion: A Neoplatonic Film Theory

Vincenzo Lomuscio

People ask what are my intentions with my films—my aims.
It is a difficult and dangerous question, and I usually give an evasive answer:

I try to tell the truth about the human condition, the truth as I see it.

Ingmar Bergman 1969: 21



1 Neoplatonic Questions about Film-Being

How can Neoplatonism help us to develop a philosophy of film? Generally, philosophy asks questions about reality or being, therefore any film-philosophy has to ask questions about film-being, such as: “What is a film?” “How can a film express beauty?” and “How can a film change our ideas?” Can Plotinus’ philosophy help us to answer these and similar questions? In principle, each philosophical approach can provide the basis for a film theory, because each provides us with tools for understanding reality. It is therefore possible to investigate film-being using the metaphysics of Plotinus.

The first question to be asked relates to the definition of *film*. Usually, a film is defined as a *sequence of images* of moving objects projected onto a screen. When looking at this from a Neoplatonic point of view, we discover two philosophical questions:

(1) The first concerns the essence (or reason)¹ behind this sequence. Can we define film as a *casual* sequence of images or can a sequence only be defined as a film when it follows *reason*? When we are watching a film, we are aware that we are seeing an optical illusion, and yet we focus our attention on the

¹ About the essence *as reason* see *Enneads* VI 7, 2, 10–15. All quotations are from the translation by A.H. Armstrong.

continuity of the images. Even when we see a casual sequence of images, we consider, above all else, the continuity of the images. This means that we look for the *unitary sense* of the sequence even in an *irrational sequence* of images (indeed, we might think that there is no sense in a sequence of images, only because we looked for it). Therefore, a film is an experience of becoming in which we look for a unity, a sense, or a reason that structures it. A film is a reality which we know is an illusion, but in which we look for sense. We know that images are *unreal*,² but we look for *truth* within them.

(2) The second question concerns the dualism between reality and illusion that lies between the tangible image equipment and the optical illusion in our mind. Paradoxically, we have more reality in our mind than there is in a material sequence of projections. We consider the moving images to be *real* and forget that we are experiencing an optical illusion; this means that *the relationship between reality and illusion seems inverted*. The optical illusion of moving images seems closer to reality than the physical reality (the sequence of frames projected onto the screen). How can an illusion give us reality? How can an optical illusion be closer to reality than material reality?

On one hand, we look for a *reason* through the sequence of images; on the other, we look for *reality* through the optical illusion. In a Neoplatonic way, we can understand this twofold experience: why it is possible to grasp reason and reality through illusions and becoming? According to Plotinus, images and material frames are closer to non-being than being: “when we are dealing with objects of sense; for there is nothing for them which is substance, but only affections of substance” (11 6, 1, 49–50). However, if the images are *unreal*, they open *the relationship with their origin*. In this sense, we cannot consider the unreality of images to be pure inconsistency, because they are *the effect of a higher original reality*: “Now it has already been said that what comes into being cannot be the same as that from which it comes; we must add at this stage that what has come into being is not substance. But how, then, does there come to be in the intelligible world that we said was substance, when we said it did not come from substance?” (11 6, 1, 52–53).

The images are derived from a higher reality and show this in themselves. This higher reality has to be the reason of unity and meaning of images; therefore, it cannot be their material support, but a rational reality. Indeed, when we watch a film, we are interested in *what the images represent*, not in the material image equipment, or in the images themselves. We are interested, first

2 Even when watching a simple documentary we *never see reality as such*. Not only because the framing is partial or the editing is selective, but because what we are watching is itself a sequence of artificial images and not reality as such.

and foremost, in the *objects* represented by those images, objects that we can consider with regard to their origin (things, persons, events), rather than with regard to the material sequence of projection. When watching a film, we have a radical experience of inconsistent becoming, yet we are not interested in the becoming itself or its matter, as we are focused on what appears through this becoming. In other words, we are not interested in the representation, but in what is being represented.³

What is the reality expressed through images? According to Plotinus, as well as Plato and Aristotle,⁴ sensible things are always *composed realities*, since they concern something that does not change (intelligible forms), but that produces the becoming in what receives it (sensible bodies). The becoming is the clear demonstration of the form-matter relationship: "If each individual thing is a composite, it is composed of matter and form" (II 4, 6, 10).

These intelligible forms can be considered according to different levels of reality and therefore of knowledge (Nous, Soul, individual souls, sensible bodies). The nearest forms we know are those we recognize in sensible bodies and by our individual minds; beyond this level of knowledge, we can recognize the forms *life as such* in a higher intelligible life, in a universal mind, or soul. Through this universal knowledge in which all beings are regarded, we can reach the *knowledge as such*: the Nous, or Intellect. This is the highest level of reality and therefore of knowledge:

Intellect gives [forms] to the Soul of the All, and Soul (the one which comes next after Intellect) gives from itself from the soul next after it, enlightening it and impressing form on it, and this last soul immediately makes, as if under orders. It makes some things without hindrance, but in others, the worse ones, it meets obstruction. (II 3, 17, 15–18)

In our sensible experience, we know and define intelligible forms. For example, when I see a movie, I have a sensible experience in which I define a set of forms: I know the story, the characters, and the locations; all *that is definable* is a form. In each sensible experience, "judgments are acts of knowledge of the affections distinct from the affections themselves" (IV 6, 2, 17–19). Forms are objects of our knowledge, which we can define and maintain awareness of even without perception; they are in themselves *intelligible*, not sensible.

³ Like in all other languages, where we overcome the significant towards the significance.

⁴ About the differences among Plotinus, Plato and Aristotle on the nature of physical reality see Wagner 1996: 130–170, Narbonne 1993: 209–211, Corrigan 1996: 32–297; O'Brien 1991: 45–71; Schwyzer 1973: 266–280; Chiaradonna 2006: 63–66.

This transcendence from sensible things, according to Plotinus, demonstrates that intelligible forms have a noetic and ontological precedence, so much so that “it is perhaps ridiculous to enquire whether there is intellect in the world” (v 9, 3, 5–6). Moreover, because “the better precedes the worse, and the better is Form, and the worse is not, but rather privation of from” (I 8, 1, 16–17), this intelligibility can be regarded as a kind of idealism (see Wagner 1985: 269–292; Linguisti 2007: 116–117).

The changing images and generally all sensible things (sounds, rhythms, visual proportions, etc.) are always images of definable forms, and those that do not understand material things cannot understand definable forms.⁵ As the forms are definable, they are intelligible and therefore considerable without their sensible support:

[The man] must be led and taught to make abstraction of the material element in them and come to the principles from which their proportions and ordering forces derive and to the beauty which is in these principles, and learn that this was what excited him, the intelligible harmony and the beauty in it, and beauty universal, not just some particular beauty, and he must have the doctrines of philosophy implanted in him; by these he must be brought to firm confidence in what he possesses without knowing it. (I 3, 1, 30–35)

The intelligible forms have effects (images) in the sensible world, they express themselves in sensible things, but *they cannot become matter*. Therefore, matter never becomes a form or an actuality. Matter is regarded as a pure condition of the transformation of sensible things, a mere mirror to reflect the forms: it is what allows the continuous change from one form to another, but in itself it is pure privation. Because matter is pure passivity, it is without actuality, without its own form: it is pure “Otherness” or not-being. Some scholars suggest a parallelism between Plotinus’ view of matter and celluloid (Gerson 1994: 112; Narbonne 1998: 87–88; Linguisti 2007: 119), reading both *Enneads* II, 5 and *Enneads* III, 6: the matter is like a pellicle on which we see a sequence of images. The *pellicle* remains the same (it never *becomes* an image), what changes

5 *Enneads*, II, 9, 16.49–56: “But if someone who sees beauty excellently represented in a face is carried to that higher world, will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense, all its good proportions and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendor of form which is manifested in the stars, for all their remoteness, he will not thereupon think, seized with reverence, “What wonders, and from what a source?” If he did not, he would neither have understood this world here nor seen that higher world.”

is only the *sequence* of images (the alternation of forms), which gives us the illusion of becoming.

When we perceive a process of becoming, our mind looks for a unity, an *intelligible unity that orders each moment of process*. When we recognize a unity that keeps together a becoming, we grasp an intelligible form. Scholars are divided over the correct interpretation of becoming in Plotinus, because it can be understood as pure inconsistency (Narbonne, Linguisti, Wagner), or as the lowest kind of consistency (van Riel, Opsomer, Corrigan). In each case, what we know through the becoming are the intelligible forms, even if they are the lowest degradation of Intelligence. On one hand the forms in the sensible world are very distant from Ideas while, on the other, they maintain their relationship with the Intelligible Knowledge through our souls. Our souls, or our minds, are the meeting place between the sensible world and the truth. Especially when the sensible objects are artistic ones, therefore when they are organized by human minds.

And as for the arts which produce artificial sense-objects, for instance building and carpentry, in so far as they make use of proportions, they would have their principles from the intelligible world and the practical thinking there; but since they mix these up with what is perceived by the senses they would not be altogether in the intelligible world, except in the man. (v 9, 11, 14–18)

It follows that when watching a film we can define a kind of reality through illusory images. We enter into understandings about intelligible objects. These objects are primarily characters and events represented by images, but they are above all the *real meanings* that we recognize in characters and events (Casebier 1991: 13–15). We know, for example, that events represented in an action movie are impossible, or that a romance movie is a constructed story, but we do not consider their impossibility or see them as works of pure imagination. Rather, if we enjoy a movie, we view the situations portrayed as *virtually possible*. This means that we consider them as they relate to our life. Indeed, we empathize with the characters or imagine ourselves in similar situations; we recognize a relationship between the movie and reality. Even when watching *Alien* or *Blade Runner*, we recognize several real meanings (Mulhall 2016: 8–9), ideas, or forms which are familiar to us. On the contrary, when we do not feel a real meaning or a kind of truth in a movie, we are not captivated by it.

To understand this point we have to consider, as Plato argued (*Sophist* 252e–254b), that each form or idea is understandable through a set of relationships with other forms:

For the shapes also, of man for instance, are composed of so many different elements, thought that overall is one. And they are better and worse than each other, eye and finger, but they belong to one; and the whole is not worse but, because it is so, is better; and the rationally defined forming principle is living being and something else, which is not the same as "living being." (VI 7, 10, 10–16)

Therefore, if a movie expresses an idea, it expresses *a relationship among forms* (and, through the forms, a relationship among Ideas), dominated by a unity (III 8, 8, 41–48). When we watch a movie, we are interested in the relationship among Ideas, in the connections of truth. In an action or a western movie, for example, most situations represent a relationship between action and salvation. We feel this relationship is real because it belongs to us too; "How can I save myself from a danger?" is a universal question, it concerns universal knowledge. A movie can express this question of salvation in relation to virtuous conduct (as in Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), or as unrelated to virtuous conduct (as in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*). We are interested in this relationship as it is an intelligible relationship visible in specific contexts. We are captivated by a movie when it succeeds in showing universal truths (Ideas) in specific contexts.

We could argue that this captivation is not intelligible, but sensitive, because a movie plays with our sensorial emotions. The scenes from a horror or a thriller movie can produce emotions such as fear, desire and hope. Yet, each sensation can arise because the images have elements that create *expectation* (see Bordwell 1985: 31). An expectation is not a pure sensation because there is a prediction of what could happen, a consideration of what has just happened and an interpretation of what is happening (see Currie 1991: 106). Sensations arise thanks to our *temporal understanding* of scenes. If our understanding is temporal, we recognize a diachronically developed form, for example, the purpose of a character or the effects of a physical event. This understanding of forms or Ideas therefore allows the development of a scene to be recognized and a set of emotions to be linked with its respective expectations.

2 Becoming and Beauty: Neoplatonic Metaphysics of Movies

Therefore, when enjoying a film, we discover relationships between Ideas and Beauty; we empathize with characters and situations, we are intensely involved with the storyline and, as such, *we feel them as real*. We view the film's

representations to the extent that they are linked with reality; not a material reality, but an intelligible one. If a movie expresses beauty or something we recognize as real, this reality transcends the given concrete situation and shows a *universal truth* which can be expressed through different realities (Casebier 1991: 35).

Even in neo-realist films, the representation of pure concrete reality does not suffice to make an interesting film. A concrete situation can be interesting—and so can be beauty—when it shows a truth higher than itself. For example, the neo-realist movie *Roma Città Aperta* (Rossellini: 1945) achieves this not only because it shows the Italian situation during the Nazi occupation, but also because it helps us to understand the essential relationship between freedom, justice, and the value of life. We are moved by the sacrifice of Don Pietro, who gives his life to help his friends, and by the undeserved killing of Pina because, through these scenes, we recognize this relationship between freedom, justice, and life. We understand that this is relevant to us and we are also moved to consider freedom and justice as something greater than life itself. The film is beautiful not because it is realistic, but it is realistic because it is beautiful: it *expresses* a universal truth, or Idea.

According to Plotinus, the relationship between beauty and truth reveals beauty's intelligible nature. We grasp beauty through images, but only because they express something which transcends them. This transcendence belongs to universal essence, which we recognize cognitively. We know a *real form* or an *idea*; we recognize a *universal essence* that may not be reduced to a given existence represented by images. We enjoy images because they carry us along with them, giving us a mental experience. The beauty is appreciated by our soul or our mind. Indeed, because we recognize beauty, *we have a notion of beauty* as "something which we become aware of even at first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood it, recognizes and welcomes it and as it were adapt itself to it" (I 6, 2, 2–3). Therefore, because we recognize beauty by ourselves, there is a relationship between beauty and the mind: "What is it, which makes us imagine that bodies are beautiful and attracts our hearing to sounds because of their beauty?" (I 6, 1, 9–10).

What we recognize in a beautiful piece of work, music or discourse is an *invisible unity* among parts. When we enjoy beauty, *we enjoy a unity which makes the parts a whole*. Our notion of Beauty is that of experiencing a higher unity ordering a whole. An invisible unity appears through sensible things. Until this unity appears, we recognize the beauty; indeed, the same things can sometimes appear beautiful and sometimes not, meaning that they are not beauty by themselves but that they convey beauty. They are ordered by a transcendent unity:

Some things, bodies for instance, are not beautiful from the nature of the objects themselves, but by participation, others are beauties themselves, like the nature of virtue. The same bodies appear sometimes beautiful, sometimes not beautiful, so that their being bodies is one thing, their being beautiful another. (I 6, 1, 15–17)

We can experience this unity ourselves every time we have behaved respectably, we engage in an amazing discourse, or we prepare our body with thorough training. In all of these experiences, we have a unity among parts (among the actions, the words, or the parts of our body); we have a holistic experience through which Beauty appears.

This consideration becomes very useful for creating film aesthetics. The parts of a movie include the actors, the screenplay, the direction, the music, and the set design; to have a good film, all of these parts *have to make a whole*. That is to say, all of the components *have to follow a single Idea*. There must be an intelligible form directing all of the components:

On this theory nothing single and simple, but only a composite thing will have any beauty. It will be the whole which is beautiful, and the parts will not have the properties of beauty by themselves, but will contribute to the beauty of the whole. But if the whole is beautiful the parts must be beautiful too; a beautiful whole can be certainly not be composed of ugly parts: all the parts must have beauty. (I 6, 1, 25–29)

Therefore, we enjoy beauty because we discern the Idea or form through the material images we see. Each element of the movie is beautiful, but only because it is linked to others by the same Idea.

When the sense-perception, then, sees the form (*eidos*) in bodies binding and mastering the nature opposed to it, which is shapeless, and shape riding gloriously upon other shapes, it gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in, now without parts, to the soul's interior and presents it to that which is within as something in tune with it and fitting it and dear to it; just as when a good man sees a trace of virtue in the young, which is in tune with his own inner truth, the sight delights him. (I 6, 3, 10–17)

Indeed, Plotinus argues that all minds contemplate the same Idea when they recognize beauty (III 8, 5, 32). To create a good movie, this Idea has to be recognizable. *The Godfather*, for example, is a good film not only because there are decent

performances by the actors, a nice soundtrack, and suggestive photography, but above all because these aspects follow the same Idea. All the elements, including the characters, screenplay and costumes succeed in expressing the form of the mafia, its logic and its ethos. We recognize the characters' attitudes and mentalities, their views on family, and their world values; we understand what the mafia is and view their world values *as real*. This means that the film succeeds in showing us *how the mafia can be possible* too, not because it shows the historical origins of the mafia, but because it shows its possibility as being rooted in the heart of man, in the human desire to obtain power without relinquishing moral values (through the development of Michael Corleone's relationship with his family).

At this point, we can describe our aesthetic experience of film on three ontological levels: when we see a movie (1) we know that it is an *optical illusion*, but (2) we focus our attention on *what is represented* through this illusion. Furthermore, we know that what is represented (persons, actions, dialogues, etc.) are mind constructions and not real, but (3) we recognize them as being linked with reality, because they express *forms* or *Ideas* that we can experience in other aspects of reality. This experience can be described through the three ontological levels outlined by Plotinus:

- Nous (intelligible forms, ideas) → veracity, meaning, truth experience
- Soul/Mind (persons, actions, story...) → empathy, understanding as real, life experience
- Sensible bodies (celluloid, frames, lights) → optical illusions, physical experience

From sensory experiences of fake realities, we understand intelligible and universal truths. Through the sensible bodies, we discern and judge intelligible forms. Our aesthetic perception is in itself inhabited by our mind and, therefore, by our relationship with the truth, or with Ideas. Because we are *minds in relationship with intelligible forms*, our sensory experiences are also intellectual ones: "For the perceptive part of the soul is in some way capable of judgment, and the imaging part has a sort of intelligence, and impulse and desire are there following the lead of the imaging faculty, and reason. The reasoning part therefore is there in the perceptive not as in a place but because that which is there draws upon it" (IV 3, 23, 32–36).

When we relate our thinking to images we are looking for thought, knowledge and Ideas:

Therefore, even though the soul is always moved to intelligent activity, it is when it comes to be in the image-making power that we apprehend it.

The intellectual act is one thing and the apprehension of it another, and we are always intellectually active but do not always apprehend our activity; and this is because that which receives it does not only receive acts of the intelligence, but also, on its other side, perceptions. (IV 3, 30, 11–17)

And what interests us about intelligible forms? According to Plotinus, we are looking for the source of any beauty, for the extreme Good:

But if it only desires Intellect, perhaps it might be in need of further reasoning to show that Intellect is not the ultimate and that not all things desire Intellect but all things desire the Good. And not all of the things which do not have intellect seek to gain possession of it, and the things that have intellect do not stop there, but again seek the Good, and they seek Intellect from their reasoning, but the Good even before reason (VI 7, 20, 16–22)

We are looking for knowledge because we desire Good most of all; to live, to continue our existence and to act. The relationship with Good is the relationship with the source of beauty. When we know an expression of beauty (e.g., a good movie), we see a relationship between a mind (the auteur's mind) and the source of Beauty. We enjoy the movie because we discover the infinite potential of this relationship.

But when we say that something is good, are we not going to maintain that it is akin? Rather we must maintain that one must judge the good by what is higher than what is akin and by what is better than the thing itself, to which it is potentially directed. For, since it is potentially directed to what it is, it is in need of it, and what it is in need of as something higher than it, that is its good. (VI 7, 27, 8–11)

This relationship with Good is the relationship we need to express our potential. Therefore, when enjoying a particular thing of Beauty—and in our case a particular movie—"we have our parts in the Good" (VI 7, 30, 36–37); we see the source of Beauty as the source of each possibility for expressing beauty.

Where then is he who made the beauty which is so great and the life which is so great, he who is the generator of substance? You see the beauty which rests upon the very Forms, all of them richly varied. It is so beautiful to abide here; but when one is in beauty one must look to see

whence these Forms come and whence they derive their beauty. But this itself must not be any one of them; for then it will be one of them and will be a part. Nor, then, can it be a shape of any kind or an individual power, nor again all those which have come to be and exist here above, but it must be above all powers and above all shapes. (VI 7, 32.1–9)

According to Plotinus, through the aesthetic/cognitive experience we look for the source of Beauty. Applied to film theory, this means that through the beauty of a movie, we come to know an Idea (or a relationship among Ideas) and through this intelligible experience, we touch the creative origin of Beauty, which is our innate desire.⁶ Indeed, only when a director or an auteur masters a form do they succeed in expressing it. To be creative, they have to know the Idea and make it understandable for us. When enjoying the film we understand the Idea both as Idea and as the source of creativity and beauty.

If the relationship to intelligible forms produces creativity and beauty, this relationship constitutes the place of the freedom: “We shall assert that virtue and intellect have the mastery and that we should refer being in our own power and freedom to them” (VI 8, 6, 6–10). Thinking intelligible realities, indeed, raises us to the level of Knowledge (Intellect, Nous). For Plotinus, the intellectual experience is the aim of each activity, even if we want produce sensible objects (for example a movie): each of our activities is always *finalized to contemplate* intelligible realities (III 8, 1–6). Toward Knowledge we gain the freedom, because nothing is so free as Intellect, and this for two reasons: 1) each knowing of Intellect regards only intelligible realities (VI 8, 6, 6–23) without the possibility of external impediments; 2) this intelligible self-relationship of Knowledge is actually the relationship with the Good, which indirectly appears through Intellect (III 8, 9) and which is the real aim that we seek. Toward Knowledge we desire “the Good before reason.”

But if it only desires Intellect, perhaps it might be in need of further reasoning to show that Intellect is not the ultimate and that not all things desire Intellect but all things desire the Good. And not all of the things which do not have intellect seek to gain possession of it, and the things that have intellect do not stop there, but again seek the Good, and they seek Intellect from their reasoning, but the Good even before reason. And if

6 See V 5, 12, 19–20: “the more ancient, unperceived desire of the Good proclaims that the Good itself is more ancient and prior to the beauty.”

they also seek life, and everlasting existence and activity, what they desire is not Intellect in so far as it is Intellect, but in so far as it is good and from the Good and directed to the Good: since this is also with life. (VI 7, 20, 19–24)

The Good is the transcendent origin of Intellect. Through this transcendence, it is possible for there to be a relationship between the Knowledge and its grounds. Only by way of this relationship with the Good is the Freedom possible (VI 8, 12, 18–20). In fact, if we deny the transcendence of grounds (like in Stoicism), we cannot think the possibility of freedom, but only about the Destiny (III 1, 7). Whereas, according to Plotinus, when we move towards Beauty through Ideas, we gain the free source of knowledge, therefore the source of freedom. This is the principle of each aesthetic experience.

The soul, then, becomes free when it presses on without hindrance to the Good by means of Intellect, and what it does through this is in its own power; but Intellect is free through itself; but the nature of the Good is the very goal of the striving and that through which the others have what is in their power, when one is able to attain it without hindrance and the other to have it. (VI 8, 7, 1–6)

3 **Essence and Image**

At this point we have to understand how an Idea becomes sensible; how can an auteur render visible an intelligible Idea and how can intellectual essence appear through sensible images?

How can one bring the very lord and master of all things of value after it, that which sits in the first seat, to which all things else want to ascend, and depend on it and have their powers from it so as to be able to have something in their power—how can one bring it [down to the level of] what is in your and my power to which Intellect also was only dragged with difficulty, though it was all the same violently dragged? (VI 8, 7, 6–11)

Our sensitive perceptions are different from intelligibles⁷ and, as mentioned above, the meeting point of intelligible and sensible realities is our mind. On

7 “If we received impressions of what we see, there will be no possibility of looking at the actual things we see, but we shall look at images and shadows of the objects of sight, so that the objects themselves will be different from the things we see” (IV 6, 1, 29–30).

one hand, because we *recognize intelligible forms* when we perceive sensible things and, on the other, because it is through intelligible forms that we can *render matter's parts and moments an organic wholeness* or an expression of Beauty (in our case a good movie). Artistic creativity and, therefore, cinematographic creativity, is possible thanks to the cognitive relationship between Ideas and the sensible world. This relationship is constant, even if we forget (v 1, 1, 1–11) how our belonging relates to the Intellectual sphere (11 9, 2, 5–10).

We have to remember that Plotinus, contrary to the Gnostic philosophers, argued that our sensible experience is always endorsed by intelligible elements. The Gnosticism claimed a strong dualism between the intelligible world and the sensible one, arguing that they are so different that it is impossible for the former to depend on the later. This radical dualism, according to Plotinus, is a misunderstanding of Plato's philosophy (11 9, 6, 10–45), which maintains that it is impossible to understand intelligible Ideas without knowing their effects on the sensible world.

The greatest beauty in the world of sense, therefore, is a manifestation of the noblest among the intelligibles, of their power and of their goodness, and all things are held together for ever, those which exist intelligibility and those which exist perceptibility, the intelligibles existing of themselves and the things perceived by the sense receiving their existence for ever by participation in them, imitating the intelligible nature as far as they can. (1v 8, 6, 23–29)

Ideas are the causes of beauty recognized within the world of sense. We understand this dependence because of Ideas in our knowledge of reality, but we directly experience it through the relationship between our mind and our body. When we perform an action, or when we talk to express a notion, we move our body in a sequence of movements. This sequence has to realize the purpose of the action, or to render understandable the meaning of the discourse. Therefore, each movement or word revolves around this unitary sense, which is the intelligible reality being emphasized and the external expression of what our mind recognizes. At the end of this sequence of movements or words, we have made the Idea visible through the reality; the form is realized on the sensible world, as “the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work” (1 6, 9, 9–11). This is the *dynamic of artwork*, in which there is an Idea to realize or a form to communicate. Until the artwork expresses the Idea, the artist modifies and repeats the work. The ideas, therefore, are objects of our knowledge that move us to act and that have effects on other realities. *Intelligible realities produce effects on our minds*

and on our actions. This way, ideas become understandable through material things, such as artwork:

As for all imitative arts, painting and sculpture, dancing and mime, which are in some way composed of elements from this world and use a model perceived by sense and imitate the forms and movements and transpose into their own terms the proportions which they see, it would not be reasonable to trace them back to the intelligible world except as included in the forming principle of man. But if any artistic skill starts from the proportions of [individual] living things and goes on from there to consider the proportions of living things in general, it would be a part of the power which also in the higher world considers and contemplates universal proportion in the intelligible. (v 9, 11, 1–7)

This intellectual approach seems incapable of explaining extemporaneous art, or the art of improvisation, in which there is a constant bilateral relationship between mind and matter, or mind and body. Plotinus is likely not to agree with this kind of artwork, because it is linked too closely with bodies and cannot make intelligible forms understandable. He may even have been a critic of the improvisation movement, since for him, the intellectual dimension is fundamental to the appearance of Beauty; if Ideas do not appear, Beauty does not appear. To establish an aesthetic of improvisation arts, it would be more helpful to use Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution, because Bergson believed in a mutual causation between spirit and matter or between creativity and changing matter (Bergson 2007: 194–195). Using Plotinus' philosophy, it is only possible to describe a unilateral causation between the intelligible and the sensible:

The work, then, of the more rational kind of soul is intellection, but not only intellection; for [if it was] why would it be different from Intellect? For by adding to its being intelligent something else, according to which it did not remain intelligence, it itself also has a work to do, like any other intelligible reality which exists. But when it looks to what comes before it it exercises its intelligence, when it looks to itself it sets in order what comes after it and directs and rules it. (1v 8, 3, 25–30)

If art is an expression of the intelligible world, this means, as Plato argued, that Ideas precede our intellectual acts; they are already in place before we think of them:

It is, then, incorrect to say that the Forms are thoughts if what is meant by this is that when intellect thought this particular Form came into existence or is this particular Form; for what is thought must be prior to this thinking [of a particular Form]. Otherwise how would it come to thinking it? Certainly, nor did it happen on it casually. (v 9, 7, 14–19)

The intellective acts are the same for all people, so they do not depend on individual minds, but on individual minds to take part in them:

If, then, the thought [of Intellect] is of what is within it, that which is within it is its immanent form, and this is the Idea. What then is this? Intellect and the intelligent substance; each individual Idea is not other than Intellect, but each is Intellect. And Intellect as a whole is all the Forms, and each individual Form is an individual intellect, as the whole body of knowledge is all its theorems, but each theorem is a part of the whole, not as being spatially distinct, but as having its particular power in the whole. (v 9, 8, 1–7)

The intelligible world is active, eternally producing knowledge. What is knowable is also an act of knowledge. This means that our knowledge involves participating in Knowledge itself, otherwise we could not explicate it since the science is common to all. If knowledge is identical among different minds, it is because they take part in the same thoughts. This common thought is the intellect world. Plotinus explains this multiplicity of unity using the metaphor of a circumference's radii: each radius has a relationship with the center, and there are infinite radii in relation with the same center; in the same way as there are a lot of minds in relation with the same Idea.⁸ Each mind has a singular relationship, but as a result of the same intellectual act/object. There is a part of our mind which participates in the intelligible world, even if we are not always conscious of it: "For thought also is whole for all, that is why

8 v 1, 11, 5–13: "And if soul sometimes reasons about the right and the good and sometimes does not, there must be in us Intellect which does not reason discursively but always possess the right, and there must be also the principle and cause and God of Intellect. He is not divided, but abides, and as he does not abide in place he is contemplated in many beings, in each and every one of those capable of receiving him as another self, just as the center of a circle exists by itself, but every one of the radii in the circle has its point in the center and the lines bring their individuality to it."

“thought is common” not one thought here and another there: for what would be ridiculous, and thought would need space” (VI 5, 10, 11–13).

In the production of a movie, we see that a lot of people work together to realize the same Idea; how could they realize the same Idea if the object were different in each mind? For the same Idea to exist in different minds, this Idea has to be an intellectual act in which they take part, and not a passive object which they possess by themselves. Each person that works to create a movie, from the writer to the costumer, personally contributes to its realization (Livingstone 2009b). Everyone follows the Idea of a particular aspect (screenplay, photography, set design, music, etc.), but if the same Idea, or set of Ideas, can be seen within the various aspects without the unity of the final work being lost, there is an identical cause that acts on different minds. Plotinus explains this process using the example of a meeting or assembly, in which the members develop the truth together:

And thought is not like white; for thought does not belong to the body; but if we truly have part in thought, it must be one and the same, all together with itself. And so we have our part in it from thence, not receiving portions of it, nor I one whole and you another, each torn apart from each. Assemblies of the people imitate this, and all meetings, being of people moving to a unity of thought; and each member is weak in thought but when everyone in the meeting, and the true meeting of minds, comes together into one, he generates and finds [true] thought. (VI 5, 10, 15–25)

This *collective work*, according to Plotinus, is *collective thinking* within the same intelligible reality. The main worker, which is the director, has to be able to align all the workers to the same Idea. If this aim is reached, the movie will have unity. Every good movie (but also every good symphony, every good novel, etc.) remains in our memory as an intelligible unity, an Idea. Because we know all the scenes by our over-temporal grasping, each scene is understood as a moving image of the same Idea (a sort of “moving image of eternity”). By thinking of each scene “out of time,” we can regard a movie as “intelligible.”

Even movies such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Magnolia*, which comprise different stories, are ultimately unitary, because there is a unique inspiration linking all of the scenes. Or, in a grotesque movie such as *Fargo*, notwithstanding the alternation between dramatic scenes and comic ones, there is no dissonance because there is a unitary inspiration; the characters are so characterized by an ingenuous egoism which we acknowledge when they are in ruin. This absurd

ingenuity invokes a latent idea of justice which continues throughout the movie, and results in the viewer empathizing with the least avid of characters (the detective Marge).

If a movie makes an Idea (or a set of Ideas) visible, we identify that movie as a whole, as a unity. In fact, when we do not have this unitary experience, we can find that some parts of a movie are heterogeneous or uninspired; we find incongruities (between parts of the story, or between the story and actors' performances, or between dialogues and characters) or a lack of clarity (the parts of movie do not show an Idea, but give us a set of situations we do not understand) or we find that the movie is too clear and so does not provide an intellectual experience.

4 Intellectual Experience and Conversion

This last point is the most important one for understanding the ontology of a movie through Plotinus' philosophy. A movie is not beautiful when it is *unclear* or when it is *too clear*. Therefore, a movie is beautiful when it is understandable, but it also has to inspire thinking. This means that to enjoy a movie we need a sensorial experience as well as an Intellectual one. What is an intellectual experience? Because Ideas are universal (even if touched by an individual relationship), an intellectual experience carries us *beyond ourselves*. Indeed, to describe an aesthetic experience, the word *rapture* is used. By Plotinus' philosophy, this rapture enters into the world of sense only because intelligible forms appear. We are moved, through movies, toward intellectual acts.

Because Ideas are related to each other, we need to discover the relationships between them in order to think about them. Therefore, a movie attempts to show the relationships between Ideas. Because each truth has a relationship with all the others, these relationships are complex. When a movie (or any other kind of artwork) shows relationships between Ideas which are overly simplified, we cannot be enraptured. Indeed, commercial movies soon become boring for us because they repeatedly show the same relationship between virtue and salvation or the same relationship between badness and ruin. Because this relationship is overly simplified and never examined in depth, we are not captivated; there is no intellectual experience and, even at best, these movies are pure entertainment.

Therefore, for an intellectual experience to help us develop ourselves, it has to show complex relationships. But this alone is not sufficient. If there are complex relationships without an Idea to unify them—without a unitary

understanding—we cannot participate in the intellectual act expressed in the movie. The movie has to show a unified complexity. To explain this kind of experience, we can take some of Bergman's movies as examples.

The Seventh Seal (Ingmar Bergman: 1957) begins with the relationship between the inexorability of death and the human attempt to postpone it or to understand its secrets (as shown through the image of the chess match between Block and Death). This relationship is complicated by the other characters (the squire, the thief, the actors), because everyone represents a different expectation of life. At the light of the (constant) presence of death, each of these characters shows us a different possibility of the awareness of death (titanic in Block, nihilistic in the squire, egoistic in the thief, etc.). This is a truth we face; due to the inexorability of death we have a greater awareness of our own life. Yet, this universal truth could remain pure multiplicity without the last scene of the movie; Death takes all of the characters, with the exception of the actors and their son Mikael.

The last scene shows us the relationship between the surviving family and life, which leads us to think about how it is different from the other relationships of the same kind; this family continues to live, while the others do not. We can attribute this to them living together as a family (because the other characters gave up living with their families), or more generally to their community of love (because the other communities, the village and the crusades tried to save their own lives by killing those at fault). The loving family, or community, is shown to be the only way to continue living, because it is the place where life is given (as shown by Mikael).

Even the anguished Block ("My whole life has been a meaningless search") receives from this little community of love a moment of meaning and peace, and he says: "I shall remember this hour of peace: the strawberries, the bowl of milk, your faces in the dusk. Mikael asleep, Jof with his lute. I shall remember our words, and shall bear this memory between my hands as carefully as a bowl of fresh milk. And this will be a sign, and a great content." This follows Jöns's words: "If everything is imperfect in this world, love is perfect in its imperfection."

Among all of the characters, only the two parents sincerely fear death and dedicate their life to loving their son. This appears to be the only way to beat death; neither Block's will to discover the mystery of death, nor the squire's cynicism as he greedily tries to make the mystery disappear (and his fear when he sees the mural painting) manages to do this. The mystery of death is insurmountable; the family understands this limit through the love for their son (Mikael in Hebrew means "who is like God"). We understand these intelligible relationships only at the end of the movie. The final scene gives us the Idea

which encompasses all of the others. At the end, we see a unitary and understandable relationship between the Ideas.

When we discover the unitary Idea, we can retrace all of the scenes with this new understanding. This is similar to what Plotinus describes as *conversion*: we come back from the sensible to the intelligible world. At the end of movie, after the sensible experience, our mind can think once again of intelligibles, looking to the Idea to which the filmmakers have looked: "The individual souls, certainly, have an intelligent desire consisting in the impulse to return to itself springing from the principle from which they came into being" (IV, 8, 4, 1–4).

Another example is *Through a Glass Darkly* (Ingmar Bergman: 1961). The story tells of the dramatic situation faced by Karin, a schizophrenic woman with problematic relationships with her father and husband. The only sane relationship she has is with her brother Minus, yet they have an incestuous love. Throughout the movie, the situation appears ever more complicated and unsolvable, and all of the character's lives seem meaningless. However, we have to wait until the end of the movie to understand the unitary relationship between these meaningless experiences. Karin's father—perhaps the most controversial character until that moment—has a dialogue with Minus:

MINUS: Reality... cracked, and I fell out. It's like in dreams... Anything can happen. Anything!

DAVID: I know.

MINUS: I can't live in this new world.

DAVID: Yes, you can. But you have to have something to hold on to.

MINUS: What would that be—a god? Give me a proof of God! You can't.

DAVID: Yes, I can. But you have to listen carefully.

MINUS: Yes... I need to listen.

DAVID: I can only give you an indication of my own hope. It's knowing that love exists for real in the human world.

MINUS: A special kind of love, I suppose?

DAVID: All kinds, Minus. The highest and the lowest, the most ridiculous and the most sublime. All kinds.

MINUS: The longing for love?

DAVID: Longing and denial. Doubt and faith.

MINUS: So love is the proof?

DAVID: I don't know whether love is proof of God's existence, or if love is God.

MINUS: For you, love and God are the same?

DAVID: I rest my emptiness and dirty hopelessness in that thought.

MINUS: Tell me more, Dad!

DAVID: Suddenly the emptiness turns into abundance—and hopelessness into life. It's like a reprieve, Minus... from a sentence of death.

MINUS: Dad... if it is as you say—then Karin is surrounded by God, since we love her. Could that help her?

DAVID: I believe so.”

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to establish a movie ontology using Plotinus' metaphysics. I reiterate my proposal. When we watch a movie, we know that we see an optical illusion, but we focus on what is represented. Although we know that what is represented is fake and a mind construction by the auteur (soul/mind), we recognize something of truth within it (they are intelligible realities that are transversal to concrete situations, and therefore Ideas). We are interested in Ideas because they belong to our origin, the source of meaning which is also the source of Beauty and freedom. Beauty is an expression of intelligible reality, which can make a whole collective work. Every intelligible Idea always consists of Ideas with connected relationships and is a transcendent intellectual act in which filmmakers take part. These relationships between Ideas are unified by a main relationship, which makes the movie understandable. This main relationship helps us to understand the movie as a whole; therefore we can retrace all its moments and convert them to the main Idea. This is an example of Plotinus' intelligible conversion, in which we move from the sensible to the intelligible world.

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Character, Spectator, Film: On Cinema as a Plotinian Hierarchy

Enrico Terrone

In this paper, I will relate the three basic principles of Plotinus' metaphysics: *the One*, *Intellect*, and *Soul* (cf. Gerson 2014) to what I take to be the three main components of cinema. I will discuss, *Film* as the work from which a world emanates; *Spectator* as the condition of the observers of that world; and *Character* as the condition of the inhabitants of that world. I will do so by comparing the Plotinian ascent with the film experience. I will argue that the former climbs from Soul to Intellect and ultimately to the One, so the latter can climb from Character to Spectator and ultimately to the Film.

1 Character or Soul

Plotinus conceives of the human person as a conflicted entity that is capable of both purely intellectual states and embodied states such as needs and desires for worldly things (cf. *Enneads* IV 8, 4; see also III 6, 3). Embodied states lead the human person to abide by Soul understood as “the principle of desire for objects that are *external* to the agent of desire” (Gerson 2014). Yet, when we watch a film our attitudes sharply change. Instead of trying to fulfill *our* needs and desires, we look at characters who try to fulfill *their* needs and desires. Thus, in cinema, Soul primarily corresponds to the condition of characters, namely Character. Plotinus himself compares the soul to an actor playing a character: “the soul, coming on the stage in this universal poetic creation and making itself a part of the play, supplies of itself the good or the bad in its acting” (*Enneads* III 2, 17).

With respect to the world created by a film, characters are embodied souls that inhabit space and time, whereas spectators may behave as pure observers, who can enjoy a state of contemplation that is pure perception disentangled from need, desire, volition, and action. This difference is symbolized by the cinematic frame, which encloses the characters while leaving the spectators completely outside. The actions of characters occur within the frame, in the

dramatically changing world of bodies and matter, while spectators look at all of that from outside.

Thus, Character is a condition essentially linked to space, time and causality, and essentially affected by needs and desires. The characters have their places in narratives, which are sequences of causally connected events that occur in a spatiotemporal framework and that aim at a resolution. The resolution is generally the fulfillment of a need or a desire on the part of characters. Aristotle, in his *Poetics* (18–19), compares a narrative to “a knot to untie,” and, out of metaphor, the knot is revealed as a need or desire for the fulfillment of which the character has to struggle. Gilles Deleuze, in his book *The Movement-Image*, implicitly endorses such a model in characterizing what he calls the “image action” as a struggle leading from a situation S to a new situation S’ through an action A (the SAS’ pattern, see Deleuze 1986, 142); or, alternatively, as a struggle leading from an action A to a new action A’ through a situation S (the ASA’ pattern, see Deleuze 1986, 167). Deleuze emphasizes the role of “the sensory-motor schema” in such struggles, especially the crucial role of needs and desires as a link between perception and action. He characterizes this through “the impulse-image” (see Deleuze 1986, 112–140).

In a similar vein, but more explicitly, the formalist scholars (see Thompson 1999; Bordwell 2006) and the neo-Aristotelian story analysts (see McKee 1997; Field 2005) acknowledge the key role of the Aristotelian “knot to untie” in film narratives. In particular, John Truby argues that the desires of characters are the core of any well-formed narrative:

In the dramatic code, change is fueled by desire. The “story world” doesn’t boil down to “I think, therefore I am” but rather “I want, therefore I am.” Desire in all of its facets is what makes the world go around. It is what propels all conscious, living things and gives them direction. A story tracks what a person wants, what he’ll do to get it, and what costs he’ll have to pay along the way (...). Any character who goes after a desire and is impeded is forced to struggle (otherwise the story is over). And that struggle makes him change.

TRUBY 2007: 10

Truby also offers a clarification of the link between a desire and the corresponding need:

Desire is the driving force in the story, the line from which everything else hangs. Desire is intimately connected to need. In most stories, when the

hero accomplishes his goal, he also fulfills his need. Let's look at a simple example from nature. A lion is hungry and needs food (a physical need). He sees a herd of antelope go by and spots a young one that he wants (desire). If he can catch the little antelope, he won't be hungry anymore. End of story. (50)

Following Truby, we can treat narratives as streams of actions aimed at fulfilling needs and desires of characters. In this sense, the best way to summarize the story told by a movie in a few lines is to spell out the needs and the desires that drive the actions of the main characters. Indeed, narratives imitate human life primarily by emphasizing a key component of human life itself, namely the struggle for the satisfaction of needs and desires. From this perspective, watching a narrative film is, first of all, watching the struggle of characters fulfill their needs and desires within a spatiotemporal material world ruled by the laws of causality. That is why the cinematic condition that I have named *Character* corresponds to the ontological condition that Plotinus names *Soul*.

While watching a movie, the spectator might be absorbed by the struggle of characters for the satisfaction of their needs and desires. In fact, some films exhibit a strong capacity to involve the spectator in the vicissitudes of characters. This capacity comes from the perceptual nature of the film experience, i.e. from the strong similarity between the film experience and ordinary perception. Such a similarity has recently been emphasized by scholars in cognitive science and neuroscience who provide experimental data in support of the thesis that the spectator's brain often reacts as if the spectator was directly involved in the actions performed by characters (cf. Anderson 1996, Shimamura 2013, Zacks 2015). These experiments bring new life to film theories that explain the condition of spectators identifying with characters (cf. Branigan 1984, Grodal 1997; Gaut 2010).

I argue that such accounts capture an important aspect of the film experience, but they risk overlooking other aspects of this experience that are at least equally important, and arguably even more important. In Plotinian terms, these accounts allow us to better understand the way in which the spectator experiences what it is to be *Character* thereby acknowledging what it is to be *Soul*. Yet, the spectator's condition does not come down to *Character*, just as, according to Plotinus, the human condition does not come down to *Soul*. More specifically, Plotinus describes the individual soul as composed of a higher part related to Intellect and a lower part related to the body and the sensible world. *Character*, as essentially driven by needs and desires for worldly objects, is related to the lower part of *Soul*. Most characters are individuated first of all by the needs and desires for worldly objects. However, some characters may

occasionally also exhibit features related to the higher part of Soul, thereby triggering the spectator's ascent from Soul to Intellect.

To sum up, Character is a key component of narrative cinema, and the proximity of spectators to characters, which is enabled by the cinematic medium, correspondingly is a key component of the film experience. Arguably, this is a basic reason for spectators to enjoy movies. And yet, this is not the whole story. There can be more in the experience of cinema than just a perceptual proximity to the experience of characters. That is to say that there can be more in the experience of cinema than just identification or immersion. Although spectators *may be* involved in the vicissitudes of characters, and often they *actually are* so involved, they *are not necessarily* involved in such vicissitudes. Indeed, some films may encourage the spectator's involvement in what is going on in the fictional world, but other films may prefer to encourage an attitude of detachment on the part of the spectator with respect to the vicissitudes of the characters. In the latter films, the spectator does no longer share the needs and the desires of the characters but rather observes the characters struggling for the fulfillment of their needs and desires, and she does so *from the outside*. According to Plotinus, we should be able to view things in this way also in real life: "We should be spectators of murders, and all deaths, and takings and sackings of cities, as if they were on the stages of theaters [...] on a stage which is the whole earth where men have in many places set up their stages" (*Enneads* III 2, 15).

2 Spectator, or Intellect

On the one hand, each character has his or her peculiar perspective on the world: a perspective from inside that very world. On the other hand, all spectators, through the frame, can share one perspective on that world, which, in principle, is a perspective from outside. In this sense, spectators are not as individualized as characters are. Spectators can give up their particular individuality and just identify themselves with their common condition, namely Spectator, whose perspective is uniquely established by the frame.

Thus, Spectator goes beyond the metaphysical principle of Soul, by which characters are bounded. Spectator can reach the further step in the Plotinian hierarchy, namely Intellect (or *Nous*). The only activity of Intellect is contemplation of eternal and immutable Forms, which are recognized by Intellect as ultimately coinciding with Intellect itself. In this sense, Intellect is both the subject and the object of contemplation (see v 8, 10–11). Likewise, through the vicissitudes of characters, Spectator recognizes eternal and immutable Forms,

which ultimately reveal its own nature. Instead of identifying with the particularity of characters and their vicissitudes, Spectator sees those characters and vicissitudes as manifestation of Forms, “those eternal and immutable entities that account for or explain the possibility of intelligible predication” (Gerson 2014). For instance, the Form of Beauty allows one to state that a certain thing is beautiful, as well as the Form of Justice allows one to state that a certain action is just.

In the universality of Forms, Spectator can ultimately recognize its own nature. That is why Spectator is not any empirical spectator, but the ideal of spectatorship. In other words, Spectator is the way in which a spectator should behave—and a film should allow a spectator to behave—in order to turn the film experience into a sort of elevation or ascent. In this sense, a naive spectator who deeply identifies with a particular character by sharing its desires and emotions fails in reaching the condition of Spectator, which corresponds to the level of Intellect, and remains at the lower level of Soul. Likewise, films that only aim at the perceptual and emotional involvement of the spectator in the vicissitudes of the characters underexploit the potential for elevation that lies in the cinematic medium. Similarly, the accounts of the film experience that just focus on the perceptual and emotional involvement of the spectator in the vicissitudes of characters overlook the potential for elevation and ascent that lies in the film experience.

The point is that the film experience is a perceptual experience quite similar to ordinary perception in certain respects, but quite peculiar in others. The main peculiarity of the film experience consists in involving an unoccupied point of view. That is to say that cinema allows us to perceive things and events without being in the spatiotemporal material causal system in which those things take place and those events occur. Unlike what happens in ordinary perception, in the film experience there is no causal spatiotemporal route that connects the perceived events (as causes) to the experience of these events (as an effect caused by these very events). Such a peculiarity of the film experience enables a sort of elevation through perception. The film experience, as a perceptual experience detached from the perceived world, allows Spectator to see things in the world from a viewpoint that is not available from within the world itself. What Spectator enjoys is, indeed, impersonal seeing, which corresponds to an ideal disembodied vision that occurs from an unoccupied perspective. Impersonal seeing, unlike ordinary seeing, does not require a spatiotemporal route connecting what is seen to the act of seeing, but only a counterfactual dependency of the latter on the former: if there had been nothing to see, there would have been no seeing, and that is all.

By delivering experience from practical involvement, impersonal seeing enables Spectator to treat the seen things as manifestations of Forms instead of as mere particulars. That is to say that cinema enables a sort of intellectual intuition through which Spectator can grasp Forms in a perceptual manner. Here is the elevation of Spectator with respect to the naive spectators: the latter identify themselves with the characters and their vicissitudes, whereas Spectator recognizes herself in Forms that she experiences through the characters and their vicissitudes.

In a similar vein, Colin McGinn (2015) argues that cinema is a Platonic sort of art since it allows us to perceive Forms. McGinn criticizes those theories of cinema, as for example Baudry's (1976), that trace the cinematic apparatus back to Plato's cave. Indeed, out of metaphor, the experience that corresponds to the condition of the prisoners in Plato's cave reveals to be ordinary perception. Conversely, cinema provides us with a different kind of perceptual experience which, according to McGinn, approximates the peculiar experience of the prisoner who exits the cave and succeeds in directly seeing the Forms. It is worth quoting in full the passage in which McGinn reverses the canonical analogy between cinema and Plato's cave:

The parable of the cave, remember, is just an analogy, not a literal description of our epistemic predicament: our experience of the empirical world is *like* seeing two-dimensional images, within Plato's overall scheme. Indeed, the mode of experience enjoyed by the escapee from the cave is precisely the *same* as our ordinary mode of empirical experience—which *Plato holds to be epistemically impoverished*. For Plato, insight into the world of Forms does not come from sense perception but from intellectual apprehension—so it is quite *unlike* the experience of the escapee. What Plato is giving us is a metaphor, not a literal account of the epistemic faculties needed to grasp the reality of Forms. So we should not woodenly interpret the movie experience as necessarily limited, as the cave dwellers' experience undoubtedly is (as Plato characterizes it). My suggestion, then, is that it is our experience of the empirical world *outside* the movie theater that is analogous to Plato's cave dwellers (as he himself supposed), and our experience *within* the movie theater is analogous to the escapee's experience *outside* the cave. That is, we gain a special insight into reality by watching movies that we don't obtain by means of our ordinary empirical experience. To put it in Platonic terms, we can gain access to Truth, Goodness, and Beauty by watching films—they give us a conduit to those "higher" realities. Let me state the position with

maximum boldness: the movie screen is a window onto a transcendent level of being. It is the portal to Plato's world of Forms, or something like it. So it is *superior* to ordinary perception as a way of knowing reality—it penetrates *beyond* the veil of appearance, i.e. the world as it is revealed by our limited and unreliable senses. As Plato would put it, in watching movies the soul makes contact with transcendent realities, which it does not do in ordinary perception of spatiotemporal particulars. The movie screen displays a deeper reality to us, thus engaging our highest mental faculties. It provides an escape from the cave of quotidian life.

MCGINN 2015, 25–26

The notion of a perceptual intuition or apprehension of Forms through cinema calls for clarification. The point is that cinema allows us to enjoy a special kind of perception in which we are not involved as a body in a spatiotemporal framework, but only as a pure perspective from outside. If we acknowledge this, even if what we see are just particular individuals within the spatiotemporal framework, we can perceive such individuals as manifestations of the Forms, which shape both this spatiotemporal framework and our experience of it. Thus, the perceptual peculiarity of cinema enables a perceptual intuition of Forms through a detached perception of characters.

The peculiar detachment of the cinematic experience allows us to see things without being emotionally and practically involved with them. In this way, things can turn out to be manifestations of Forms. Dropping the practical relation with things, which are no longer situated in our egocentric space, allows us to see things as Forms, or, if you prefer, allows us to see Forms through things. From this perspective, to perceive a Form is to perceive an instance of this Form in an absolutely detached way. The characters are particulars with respect to the spatiotemporal framework to which they are bounded, but the perspective from outside enables Spectator to see these characters as pure Forms.

The elevation leading from Character to Spectator requires cooperation between a film and its spectators. In order to pursue elevation, the film should be made in a way that does not limit itself to show a narrative world, but also imbues this particular world with Forms. Indeed, a film should make Forms more prominent and recognizable than they usually are in our actual world. Both the construction of the story and the audiovisual presentation of the narrative world should emphasize the manifestation of such Forms as Beauty or Justice through characters. On the other hand, spectators should be able to grasp the possibility of elevation through Forms that the film offers to them. In sum, the ascent from Character to Spectator involves both a film-requirement and

a spectator-requirement. If they are both satisfied, the ascent surely occurs. Nevertheless, the film-requirement is more fundamental than the spectator-requirement, since if the former is not satisfied the latter cannot be satisfied. In a nutshell, spectators can see Forms only if films make Forms manifest.

One might wonder which films satisfy this condition. In principle, the ascent from Character to Spectator may be achieved by any film that does not limit itself to tell a story, but also aims at manifesting values through the story. The common sense distinction between merely entertaining movies and somehow intellectual films can here function as a starting point. Still, it is worth noting that being entertaining does not exclude being intellectual. Directors such as Hitchcock, Kubrick, Spielberg, or Scorsese often succeeded in making films that are both entertaining and intellectual. They could do so since they showed characters struggling for the fulfillment of their needs and desires, but they also allowed us to experience this struggle in a detached way, from the outside, thereby giving us the possibility to perceptually grasp Forms instead of particular individuals. In fact, many films that Deleuze analyzes in his book *The Movement-Image* are of this kind.

It is worth noting that showing Forms in a film does not consist in “sending a message” to the spectator. If an intellectual film is just a vehicle for a moral message, then one is tempted to agree with the quip ascribed to producer Sam Goldwyn: “Pictures are for entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union.” What is at stake in the elevation from Character to Intellect is a perceptual experience of Forms, not a merely conceptual grasping of them. “Sending a message” to the spectator is a flawed way of manifesting Forms. The challenge for a film that aims at climbing from Character to Spectator consists in embodying Forms into characters, that is, in making Forms perceptible through characters and their vicissitudes. A film that succeeds in doing so is a film that has a *point*, which sensibly affects spectators and leads them to a perceptual apprehension of Forms.

3 The Film, or the One

So far so good or, at least, so far, so Platonic. Yet, from a Plotinian perspective, this is not the whole story. A further ascent is possible. Exiting the cave and contemplating the Forms is not enough. Nor does the proper move consist in going back to the cave, as is suggested by Plato. Plotinus’ point is that one should go beyond Forms and Intellect, towards the One: “Let us fly to our dear country.’ What then is our way of escape, and how are we to find it? We shall put out to sea, as Odysseus did, from the witch Circe or Calypso” (I 6, 8).

The ascent from Character to Spectator was a purification of the emotions and the desires related to the lower part of Soul, and a recognition of the universal Forms whose contemplation is the only activity of Intellect. Still, this is not the end of the ascent. There is a further step to do. The apex of the Plotinian hierarchy is the One, the absolutely simple and formless principle of all. Although Intellect recognizes its own nature in the Forms that it contemplates, Intellect as a subject remains distinct from Forms as its objects. By contrast, the One excludes any distinction. In the One, subject and object fuse into an absolute unity (see VI 7, 25).

In the ascent that can be carried out by means of cinema, this last step corresponds to a shift from Spectator to the Film. If a film succeeds in leading an audience to this last step, the intellectual contemplation of Forms, which characterizes the condition of Spectator, will be gradually supplemented and ultimately replaced by a complete identification with the Film. As seen above, the shift from Character to Spectator has required giving up emotional engagement and identification with characters. Conversely, the shift from Spectator to the Film requires a new kind of emotional engagement and identification, which is no longer directed towards particular characters but to the Film itself, understood as an absolutely self-standing formless principle from which the entire narrative world emanates. In truly Plotinian cinema, Spectator ultimately loses its own nature in the Film.

The notion of the Film makes room for a third kind of cinema, in addition to what I have called 'entertaining movies' and 'intellectual films.' We may call it 'experimental cinema.' The need for experimental cinema comes from the fact that Plotinus' philosophy, unlike Plato's, makes room for a third level in the process of ascent, and therefore for a third way of using cinema to provide spectators with an experience of elevation. The point is that the peculiarity of the film experience cannot be exhausted either by the immersion of the spectator in the fictional world or by her contemplation of the eternal Forms. There is a further possible level, which goes beyond both identification with characters and contemplation of Forms. This ultimate experience consists in penetrating the formless principle from which both Forms and the entire world shaped by Forms emanate. This principle is an absolute unity, in contrast with the multiplicity of characters and the plurality of Forms.

But which kind of experience should an experimental film provide its spectators with? And how should a film be made in order to elicit this experience? Certainly, the identification of spectators with the film cannot boil down to an identification of the spectator with the screening device, with the camera, or with the filmmaker. These are still mundane entities, whereas the experience

of the Film should approximate the experience of the One, which transcends both mundane entities and eternal Forms.

Deleuze, in his book *The Time-Image*, suggests that some films may reach an ultimate level of elevation by eliciting the experience of pure time as the substance of which the world is ultimately made. This is a perspective that favors immanence, following a line of thought connecting Stoicism as well as Spinoza's and Bergson's philosophies. From such a perspective, the end of the ascent consists in recognizing the world as a perfect whole and ourselves as parts in this perfect whole. Yet, the One in Plotinus' philosophy basically is a principle of transcendence, though Plotinus' conception of the One as the seminal power of everything ("*dunamis panton*," III 8, 10) is not totally excluding immanence.

However, there remains a sharp difference between the Plotinian One and Deleuzian time-based immanence. The One, indeed, cannot be identified with time, since time shapes the world as a whole, whereas the One is beyond the world as a whole (see V 1, 7). On the one hand, time is the life of Soul just as eternity is the life of Intellect (cf. III 7, 11). On the other hand, the One lies epistemically beyond (and ontologically behind) both time and eternity, which are both temporal notions (given that eternity is being *outside time*). Likewise, Character is included in space and time whereas Spectator observes space and time from the outside, that is, from the perspective of eternity. But the Film is epistemically beyond (and ontologically behind) this perspective. The Film, just as the One, is the principle from which all perspectives emanate.

In sum, the experience of the One is not an experience of the world as a perfect whole, but rather an experience of a perfect principle from which the world as a whole emanates. The world is experienced as perfect only in virtue of its emanating from the One, which is a perfect principle. Plotinus emphasizes the perfection of the world by comparing people who claim that the world is imperfect because of evil to "someone who censures a play because all the characters in it are not heroes but there is a servant and a yokel who speaks in a vulgar way; but the play is not a good one if one expels the inferior characters, because they too help to complete it" (III 2, 11). What gives perfection to the actual world as a whole is the One, that is, the principle from which this world emanates. Correspondingly, what gives perfection to the narrative world presented by a film is the Film understood as a principle from which this world emanates. Thus in order to lead us to the ultimate step of the ascent, a film should make us experience this principle.

It is worth recalling that this principle is not the author who made the film or the technical device that was used for making the film. These are just means

to the end of eliciting the experience of the Film, just as the 24 frames per second are just a means to the end of eliciting the experience of movement. The experience of the Film is the experience of a formless and timeless principle that unifies the world emanating from it. In order to succeed in producing such an experience, a film should lead its spectators beyond things and characters in the narrative world, and even beyond the Forms that shape this world, towards the principle on which the existence of both world and Forms depends. This dependence is not causation, since causation occurs in time and space whereas the Film, just as the One, is absolutely beyond time and space. This dependence is pure counterfactual dependence: if the Film had not existed, the narrative world would not have existed. Likewise, if the One had not existed, our world would not have existed, and that is all.

The works that I have called experimental films are such that they aim at leading spectators to the experience of the Film. Experimental films are often enigmatic and hard to be appreciated since what they try to present is something very hard to be grasped by the human mind. They try to present neither physical reality nor the Forms that shape physical reality, but the formless principle of Forms and of all the other things shaped by the Forms. I think that the works of filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage, Andrei Tarkovsky, Béla Tarr, Sharunas Bartas, in spite of relevant differences in their styles, share a common goal, which consists in making the spectator experience not only things and Forms, but the Film. I believe that also Wong Kar-wai and Hou Hsiao-hsien, at least in some films of theirs (e.g. 2046, *Millennium Mambo*), reach such an effect of elevation. Likewise, some works in film criticism can be seen as a search for films capable of eliciting the experience of the Film. For example, in his book *Transcendental Style in Film*, Paul Schrader argues that the cinematic masterpieces by Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, and Carl Theodor Dreyer can elicit such an experience from spectators. Likewise, in his book *The Story of Film*, and in the homonymous film, Mark Cousins struggles to individuate the masterpieces of the history of cinema that are capable of eliciting the most valuable experiences of elevation.

Experimental films often try to elicit the experience of the Film by means of peculiar uses of film-making techniques (I owe this insight to the talk "Film-making Techniques and Philosophical Viewpoints of Reality" given by Ran Lahav at the international conference "Thinking Reality and Time through Film," which took place in Lisbon in 2014). More specifically, experimental films manipulate the cinematic frame so to provide spectators with outstanding perceptual states that cannot be enjoyed in ordinary perception. For instance, directors such as Béla Tarr, Andrei Tarkovsky or Theo Angelopoulos employ slow and long lasting camera movements that cannot correspond

to the point of view of any character, neither to some contemplative regard from the outside. Rather, such movements seem to suggest an absolutely transcendent perspective, which might be ascribed to the Film understood as the principle from which the narrative world emanates. Likewise, directors such as Manoel de Oliveira or Hou Hsiao-hsien employ absolutely immobile points of view that seem to be situated beyond any physically possible point in space-time, and also beyond any Platonically privileged eternal observatory of Forms. On the other hand, directors such as Dreyer, Bresson or Wong Kar-wai employ close-ups and editing in ways that suggest, once again, a transcendent point of view, which is not only beyond narrative reality, but also beyond any possible intellectual contemplation of Forms.

Wong Kar-wai's *2046* also exploits slow motion to elicit peculiar experiential effects from the spectators. In particular, Wong Kar-wai uses slow-motion to represent a character engaged in ordinary actions as for example walking or smoking. As a black and white shot does not make us experience characters as being black and white, so a slow motion shot does not make us experience characters as moving slowly. What really slows in slow motion shots is not motion, but the perception of motion. Slow motion, so used, allows spectators to perceive events as unfolding in a way that is slower than their unfolding, as if time was being subtracted from this experience, thereby approximating the timeless being of the Film. In her paper *Truth, Lies, and Meaning in Slow Motion Images*, Sheena Rogers (2013) argues that slow-motion enables an ascent along three levels of film experience: Level I, which includes "both perceptual and emotional experiences that are often tightly bound to each other, such as when we respond rapidly and intuitively with an emotional response to an expression of emotion by another" (2013: 162); Level II, which requires "conscious reflective processing" (2013: 162); and Level III, which is "a very special and rare category of experience [...] that can on occasion be produced by a carefully constructed moving image presented to a well-prepared mind" (2013: 162). These levels are similar to what I have called Character, Spectator, and Film.

Finally, in the experimental works of Stan Brakhage, the timeless and formless existence of the Film is approximated by means of images that stop depicting either things in space-time or their eternal Forms, and rather seem to point towards the formless process from which both things and Forms emanate. This is arguably the limit case of experimental cinema, in which both narration and depiction are given up, in order to approximate the formless transcendent principle underlying the well-formed worlds that we usually see in films based on depiction and narration.

Making an experimental film is a very hard task, arguably the hardest task in cinema. That is because this task requires using images to elicit an experience

of something that cannot be portrayed. Likewise, assessing experimental films arguably is the hardest task in film criticism. Experimental films may appear boring and pointless, and it is difficult to recognize those experimental films that might misleadingly appear boring and pointless but ultimately reveal to be enlightening. Likewise, it is a difficult task to distinguish these films from their flawed counterparts, which gesture towards some ultimate revelation but in fact are nothing but boring and pointless stuff. I am tempted to class David Lynch's *Inland Empire* in the latter category, but maybe this is just a fault on my part, some incapacity of mine to undergo the experience of the Film that this work is trying to elicit.

In fact, this paper does not aim at establishing which films succeed in eliciting the experience of the Film and which fails in this enterprise. My aim is humbler. I just want to highlight that Plotinus' philosophy allows us to acknowledge three ways in which films can be made in order to elicit valuable experiences. I have called these three ways "entertaining movies," "intellectual films," and "experimental cinema." I have shown that they correspond to three levels in a process of ascent, namely, Character, or Soul: Spectator, or Intellect; and the Film, or the One. Ultimately, Plotinus' philosophy offers us a framework that makes room for a variety of valuable films. This challenges us to find a proper place in that framework for each of them.

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Plotinus and Tarkovsky on Experience and the Transparency of Reality

Daniel Regnier

For here below, too, we can know many things by the look in peoples' eyes when they are silent; but there all their body is clear and pure and each is like an eye, and nothing is hidden or feigned, but before one speaks to another that other has seen and understood.

PLOTINUS, *Ennead* IV 3, 27, 18, 19–22

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It seems to me that the purpose of art is to prepare the human soul for the perception of good.

TARKOVSKY in Gianvito 2006: 68

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Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky are master communicators. The enduring interest in their work is ample evidence of this. Yet both Plotinus and Tarkovsky are suspicious of approaches to communication which too sharply distinguish form and content. Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky associate communication with what we often refer to as aesthetic experience. However, neither of these thinkers would have much patience for discussions in aesthetics which attempt to explain the experience of art purely in terms of formal features of the art work (“Formalism”) or in terms of some content carried by the artwork from one subject to another (“Expressivism”). Strict versions of these two approaches to aesthetics either explicitly or implicitly adopt a discursive theory of communication. And discursive theories of communication are precisely what Plotinus and Tarkovsky reject.

Plotinian and Tarkovskian approaches to communication can be understood in the context of a Socratic tradition in which the quest for truth and beauty—philosophy—is developed in contradistinction to rhetoric, which

is frequently portrayed in Plato's early work as an art of communication and which is indifferent to truth. Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky's approaches to communication should, moreover, be situated in an aesthetic tradition with Platonic roots—but highly developed in orthodox Christianity—which elaborates an "eikonic" metaphysics, that is, a conception of reality in which one level of being is accompanied by an ontological correspondence in the form of an "image" (*eikôn*) at a lower level of reality. Finally, both Plotinus and Tarkovsky illustrate some of the fundamental differences between modern European—that is, post-Cartesian—philosophy and a pre-modern Platonic tradition of philosophy. Where modern accounts of communication are founded on the notion of a discrete subject of consciousness which interacts with the outside world through various discursive means, the Plotinian and Tarkovskian conceptions situate a much less well-defined "subject" conceived as a "soul" in direct *continuity* with the Good. Because Plotinian and Tarkovskian subjects participate in the Good and are continuous with the outer world, rather than separated off from it, it makes little sense to talk of communication as a discursive means that bridges between subjects and the outer world, or between subjects and other subjects. Since both Plotinian and Tarkovskian subjects are always in some rapport with the Good and the outer world, the range of experiences which they see as possible differs from those which thinkers committed to a picture of Cartesian consciousness usually admit.

Implicit in the works of Plotinus and Tarkovsky is the notion that the Good—at once the most profound and ubiquitous layer of reality—can *only* be experienced and communicated if those concerned are aware that all reality is ultimately one. If apparent distinctions and divisions within reality are therefore not of primordial ontological significance, this reality is, hence, in some sense "transparent." Accordingly, one need not identify different perspectives from which to access reality. For perspective assumes that the disposition of opaque objects and clearly defined subjects in the world limits access to reality. If the communicator's art takes as its task to bridge differences and to reconcile perspectives then the varieties of Platonic monism that we find in Plotinus and, arguably, in Tarkovsky, create difficulties for the theory of communication. If all soul is one, as Plotinus does not tire of reminding us, then how can there be communication between souls? Neither Plotinus nor Tarkovsky are skeptical about communication, nor do they see it as a "game" or a "practical" endeavor. On the contrary, both Plotinus and Tarkovsky credit their respective audiences with the ability to understand their most important ideas and experiences in the absence of any communicative maneuvering. This confidence in the possibilities of communication is grounded on Plotinian and Tarkovskian views of subjectivity, which put unity and the Good, as well as

freedom at the very center of the self. Moreover, both Plotinus and Tarkovsky think that a certain aporetic approach is appropriate to creating the conditions for a contemplative awareness of reality. I will examine how Plotinus and Tarkovsky conceive of non-discursive communication as a kind of communication that ultimately aims to orient their interlocutors towards the Good. A study of Plotinus and Tarkovsky together helps us to better understand both thinkers while also offering us the opportunity to better understand what both philosophy and film are capable of.

The following discussion is organized in two main sections: the first examines non-discursive communication in Plotinus and Tarkovsky; the second discusses how non-discursive communication can be applied to better understand aspects of the two thinkers' ideas of the experience the Good. In this second section, I discuss how, according to both Plotinus and Tarkovsky, the experience of the Good can be facilitated by a certain reversal of received ethical values; I also consider the role of "wonder" and briefly examine some images that facilitate in Plotinus and Tarkovsky non-discursive communication of the experience of the Good.

1 Non-discursive Communication

1.1 *Non-discursive Communication in Plotinus*

Neoplatonists are notorious for asserting that there is a level of thought qualifying as "non-discursive."¹ This is referred to in Greek as *nous* or *noêsis* usually translated as "intellect" and "intellection"² and is contrasted primarily with *dianoia* or "discursive thought"³ (although it is also distinguished from *logismos* "calculation" and other terms). In fact, the Neoplatonic conception of non-discursive thought is faithful to Platonic and Aristotelian notions (which ultimately go all the way back to Parmenides).⁴ According to Plotinus the highest levels of reality, the One and Intellect are beyond the grasp of discursive

1 For non-discursive thought in Plotinus see, Eyjólfur Emilsson, Chapter 4 "Discursive and Non-Discursive Thought" in Emilsson 2007. For a general background on the problem of non-discursive thought in Ancient Greek Philosophy see Lloyd 1969/70 and Sorabji 1982.

2 Or sometimes "mind," although in German it is translated by the more ambiguous term *Geist*; while the term is generally translated as *intellect* in French, Pierre Hadot translates Plotinus' use of this term by *esprit* precisely in order to bring out the mystical and intuitive connotations (Hadot 1993: 9–10).

3 See for example V 3, 49, 17, 15ff.

4 See Plato, *Republic* VI; Aristotle, *De anima* III 5 and *Metaphysics* XII, 6–7; See V 1, 10, 8, 14–18 on Parmenides.

thought; in fact, the One is beyond any kind of intellectual grasp including intellection.⁵ However, Plotinus' account of non-discursive thought is not only relevant in the context of metaphysical discussions. Rather, it turns out to be very important in the context of explaining more mundane experiences. That is, Plotinus goes beyond the assertion that we should recognize a kind of non-discursive thought to develop the idea that there is in fact such a thing as non-discursive *communication*. Plotinus formulates his conception of non-discursive communication most clearly in his treatise on Intelligible Beauty (v 8, 31) in a context where he reflects on the nature of Egyptian hieroglyphics and writes:

The wise men of Egypt, I think, also understood this, either by scientific or innate knowledge (*eite akribei epistêmê labontes eite kai sumphutô*), and when they wished to signify something wisely, did not use the forms of letters (*grammatôn*) which follow the order of words and propositions (*protaseis*) and imitate sounds and the enunciations of philosophical statements, but by drawing images and inscribing in their temples one particular image of each particular thing they manifested the non-discursiveness (*ou diexodon*) of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not discursive thought or deliberation (*ou dianoêsis oude bouleusis*). But [only] afterwards [others] discovered, starting from it in its concentrated unity, a representation (*eidôlon*) in something else, already unfolded and speaking it discursively (*legon auto en diexodô*) and giving reasons why (*tas aítias*) things are like this, so that, because what has come into existence is beautifully disposed, if anyone knows how to admire it he expresses his admiration of how this wisdom, which does not itself possess the reasons why substance is as it is, gives them to the things which are made according to it.

V 8, 31, 6, 1–15 trans. ARMSTRONG, modified

Plotinus suggests that an image serves as a non-discursive way of communication. In the experience of beauty the distinction between viewer and viewed is dissolved. In this way, what occurs in an artistic experience mirrors the internal nature of Intellect. Plotinus explains,

But those who do not see the whole only acknowledge the external impression (*prosbolê*), but those who are altogether, we may say, drunk and

⁵ A concise expression of the ineffability of the One at v 3, 49, 13, iff.

filled with the nectar, since the beauty has penetrated through the whole of their soul, are not simply spectators. For there is no longer one thing outside and another outside which is looking at it, but the keen sighted has what is seen, within, although having it he for the most part does not know that he has it, and looks at it as if it were outside because he looks at it as if it was something seen, and because he wants to look at it. But one looks from outside at everything one looks at as a spectacle (*pan de ho tis hôs theaton blepei exô blepei*). But one must transport what one sees into oneself, and look at it as one and look at it as oneself, as if someone possessed by a god, taken over by Phoebus or one of the Muses, could bring about the vision (*tou theou tên thean*) of the god in himself, if he had the power to look at the god in himself. (v 8 31, 10, 32–43)

Plotinus contrasts the nature of the experience of the beautiful with observation of a spectacle (*theaton*).⁶ Tarkovsky would be very sympathetic to the idea that one does not see art simply as a “spectacle” but rather as what he calls the “artistic image” (as we shall see further on). It overcomes the subject-object divide. Plotinus’ notion that “one must transport what one sees into oneself, and look at it as one, and look at it as oneself,” lies at the foundation of his understanding of non-discursive communication.

According to Plotinus, the structure of the intelligible universe is such that the levels of reality are related to one another by way of images. This relationship between image and archetype is operative at various levels in the Plotinian picture of reality, but it is invoked most significantly to explain the relationship between the intelligible universe and the sensible universe. That is, the Intellect and the intelligibles in it must be accompanied by images that we encounter in the world of the senses. By means of this “eikonic” structure Plotinus avoids all trenchant dualism. Plotinus explains:

It is utterly unlawful that there should be no beautiful image (*eikona kalên*) of beauty and reality (*ousias*). This image imitates its archetype (*arkhêtupon*) in every way, for it has life and what belongs to reality as a representation of it should, and it has its being beauty since it comes from that higher beauty; and it has its everlastingness in the way proper to an

6 Armstrong translates *theaton* as “spectacle.” It simply means “object seen.” Armstrong seems to be motivated by the context in which Plotinus contrasts the vision of this object to a more unified grasp of the situation. But he may also be taking into consideration the fact that Plotinus tends to use the terms *thea* and *theama* for “vision” understood in a positive sense.

image; otherwise [the intelligible universe] will sometimes have an image and sometime not—and this image is not the product of art (*ou tekhnê genomenês tês eikonas*), but every natural image exists as long as its archetype is there. For this reason those are not right who destroy what is thus generated, while the intelligible abides, and brings it into being as if its maker ever planned to make it. For they do not want to understand how this kind of making works, that as long as that higher reality gives its light (*ellampeî*), the rest of things can never fail: they are there as long as it is there; but it always was and will be. We must use these words (*tois onomasi*) because we are compelled to want to signify (*sêmeinein*) our meaning.

V 8, 31, 12, 13–26 trans. ARMSTRONG modified

The image is not simply a by-product, or an accidental feature of its archetype. Rather, it is more akin to the overtones which genuinely belong to the reality of the complex based on the note which music theorists call “the fundamental.” This is why Plotinus can assert both that the image “has life” (*zôên ekhei*) and that it is permanent, rather than existing simply as an epiphenomenon. Nevertheless, the image is dependent on the archetype for its being.

It is the notion of vision that allows Plotinus to elaborate the structure relating image and archetype. In fact, it is the metaphor of sight which allows Plotinus to circumvent discursivity altogether. Here we have a decisive parallel with Tarkovsky’s thought on the artistic image which cannot be translated into verbal formulae. For Plotinus the notion of vision does not only characterize the nature of our relationship to the intelligible world, but captures something of the internal nature of the intelligible:

The very being of Intellect is wisdom: it does not exist first and then become wise. For this reason there is no greater wisdom: absolute knowledge has its throne beside Intellect in their common revelation, as they say Justice is throned beside Zeus. All things of this kind there are like images (*agalmata*) seen by their own light, to be beheld “as a vision (*theama*) for exceedingly blessed spectators.” The greatness and the power of this wisdom can be imagined if we consider that it has with it and has made all things, and all things follow it, and it is the real beings, and they came to be along with it, and both are one, and reality is wisdom there. But we have not arrived at understanding this, because we consider that the branches of knowledge are made up of theorems (*theôrêmata*) and a collection of propositions (*sumphorêsin ... protaseôn*); but this is not true even of the sciences here below.

V 8, 31, 4, 39–51 translation ARMSTRONG modified

According to Plotinus, then, not even the sciences (*epistēmai*) are genuinely discursive. He suggests, perhaps somewhat provocatively, that propositions play a secondary role in the knowledge produced by the sciences. Plotinus' conception of the "eikonic" nature of reality extends to all forms of human activity. This contrasts with Tarkovsky's approach, which—perhaps under the influence of romantic currents of thought—tends to contrast the image centered activities of art with what he sees as the linear and discursive procedures of science.

Plotinus treats dialectic much as he does science. Precisely because he wishes to preserve for it a central place in philosophy Plotinus claims that in its highest form dialectic, too, is non-discursive:

Are dialectic and philosophy the same? It is the valuable part of philosophy. For it must not be thought to be a tool the philosopher uses. It is not just bare theories and rules; it deals with things and has real beings as a kind of material for its activity; it approaches them methodically and possesses real things along with its theories. It knows falsehood as something alien to the truths in itself, recognizing, when anyone brings it forward, something contrary to the rule of truth. So it does not know about propositions (*protaseôs*)—they are just letters (*grammata*)—but in knowing the truth it knows what they call propositions (*protasis*), and in general it knows the movements of the soul, what it affirms and what it denies, and whether it affirms and what it denies, and whether it affirms the same thing as it denies or something else, and if things are different from each other or the same; whatever is submitted to it it perceives by directing intuition, as sense-perception also does, but it hands over petty precisions of speech to another discipline which finds satisfaction in them. (I 3, 20, 5, 8–23)

Rather than dealing with words, dialectic deals with real things, Plotinus insists. Dialectic knows truth and the movements of the soul in a manner analogous to perception. It seems that Plotinus is asserting that knowledge and self-knowledge must coincide. They are moreover both inaccessible to discursivity.

Plotinus explains the connection between intelligible beauty and the self in terms of kinship.⁷ According to Plotinus, the kinship between several

7 In the following passage Plotinus explains how he understands the relation between self, image and the Good by way of the notion of kinship: "And if someone assumed that the principle of love was the longing for beauty itself which was there before in men's souls, and their recognition (*epignôsin*) of it and kinship (*suggeneian*) with it and unreasoned awareness that

individuals and the good and the beautiful, which goes beyond them, also represents a kinship between the individuals themselves. In other words, non-discursive communication is grounded in the Good.

Finally, Plotinus' conception of non-discursive communication is manifest in the manner he addresses his reader. Plotinus speaks to his reader as an equal partner. Indeed, we know that he wrote largely at the request of his students.⁸ Plotinus tends to structure his texts with many apparently spontaneous questions that a real or imagined interlocutor might raise: "someone might say..." Plotinus' procedure sometimes even seems to be experimental, for example when he writes, "Suppose we said, playing at first before we set out to be serious, that all things aspire to contemplation, and direct their gaze to this end—not only rational but irrational living things ..." (III 8, 30, 1, 1–3). Not only does Plotinus often address his readers in the first person plural, but he often uses this very same pronoun to discuss the real nature of the self (e.g. I 1, 54, Chapter 7 and *passim*). We might say that Plotinus operates on the assumption that we are already connected to one another so that in communication the goal should be to lift barriers. One might call it "negative communication" insofar as it is analogous to "negative theology."

1.2 *Non-discursive Communication in Tarkovsky*

Tarkovsky expressly situates communication at the center of his understanding of art. Tarkovskian art is never purely formal. In the creative process, Tarkovsky always has his audience in view. Yet, as one might expect, communication for Tarkovsky does not amount to the exchange of information, the expression of internal states or the participation in a "game." In fact, Tarkovsky speaks of "communication" and "communion" in the very same breath, as if in the context of art they were the very same thing: "The great function of art is communication, since mutual understanding is a force to unite people, and the spirit of communion is one of the most important aspects of artistic creativity" (Tarkovsky 1986: 39–40). Several lines later we will find Tarkovsky engaged in a discussion of intuition and its central role in artistic creation, implying that

it is something of their own (*oikeiotêtos alogon sunesin*), he would hit, I think, on the truth about its cause (*tou alêthous tês aitiâs*). For the ugly is opposed to nature and to God. For nature when it creates looks towards beauty, and it looks towards the definite, which is "in the column of the good"; but the indefinite is ugly and belongs to the other column. And nature has its principle from above, from the Good and obviously, from Beauty. But if anyone delights in something and is akin to it (*esti suggenes*), he becomes close (*ôkeiôtai*) also to its images (*eikonas*)" (III 5, 50 1, 16–26, trans. Armstrong modified).

8 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* Chapter 5. In *Enneads* 1.

it is the intuitively acquired insight—the experience—that is the ground and content for artistic communication. Communication is effected, moreover, through the artistic image rather than through any discursive means:⁹ “If in science it is possible to substantiate the truth of one’s case and prove it logically to one’s opponents,[then] in art it is impossible to convince anyone that you are right if the created images have left him cold, if they have failed to win him with a newly discovered truth about the world” (Tarkovsky 1986: 41). The moment of discovery in art is essential for Tarkovsky, linked as it is to a sense of wonder which shall be discussed further on. The artistic image is not the product of a subjective fantasy. Rather, it is a “world” going beyond the artist, who experiences it as a revelation. Here Tarkovsky dissolves the distinction between subject and object as does Plotinus. Tarkovsky explains that

the artist reveals his world to us, and forces us either to believe in it or to reject it as something irrelevant and unconvincing. In creating an image he subordinates his own thought, which becomes insignificant in the face of that emotionally perceived image of the world that has appeared to him like revelation. For thought is brief, whereas the image is absolute.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 41¹⁰

Tarkovsky clearly sees this “image” as independent from any kind of discourse that might be developed around it. This is why the artist must, as Tarkovsky had

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- 9 That Tarkovsky considers the artistic image non-discursive can hardly be doubted. Compare the following passages: “The Image is an impression of truth, a glimpse of the truth permitted to us in our blindness. The incarnate image will be faithful when its articulations are palpably the expression of truth, when they make it unique, singular—as life is, even in its simplest manifestations” (Tarkovsky 1986: 106). And: “It is hard to imagine that a concept like *artistic image* could ever be expressed in a precise thesis, easily formulated and understandable. It is not possible, nor would one wish it to be so. I can only say that the image stretches out into infinity, and leads to the absolute” (104).
- 10 Compare Tarkovsky’s remarks on the way in which the artist creates a “world” which is the condition for unmediated experience: “My objective is to create my own world and these images which we create mean nothing more than the images which they are. We have forgotten how to relate emotionally to art: we treat it like editors, search in it for that which the artist has supposedly hidden. It is actually much simpler than that, otherwise art would have no meaning. You have to be a child—incidentally children understand my pictures very well, and I haven’t met a single serious critic who could stand knee-high to those children. We think that art demands special knowledge; we demand some higher meaning from an author, but the work must act directly on our hearts or it has not meaning at all” (Gianvito 2006: 67).

explained, “subordinate his own thought,” that is, the discursive thought. Indeed, like Plotinus Tarkovsky makes reference to the hieroglyphs and suggests that images are connected by a system of parallelisms in a way reminiscent of Plotinus’ suggestion that an image must always accompany a higher level of reality. Tarkovsky writes:

And so, if art carries within it a hieroglyphic of absolute truth, this will always be an image of the world, made manifest in the work once and for all time. And if cold, positivistic, scientific cognition of the world is like the ascent of an unending staircase, its artistic counterpart suggests an endless system of spheres, each one perfect and contained within itself.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 39¹¹

Tarkovsky’s view of science here contrasts starkly with that of Plotinus, which we saw above. Science serves as a foil for Tarkovsky as he elaborates his conception of art: in this account, science proceeds in a linear and incremental manner, while art is characterized by quantum leaps between levels of reality which, although whole and complete on their own, are related to one another by perfect parallelism.

According to Tarkovsky, the efficiency of communication in film relies on absolute fidelity to the director’s experience. Tarkovsky’s insistence on the centrality of the director’s experience allows us to better understand his *auteurism*, which, although certainly in part inspired by romantic conceptions of the nature of the artist, does not accord to him any real superiority. In fact, it is the director’s fidelity to the self that allows artists to discover what they share with others and, hence, to communicate. Note the use of the notion of “kinship”—echoing Plotinus’ *suggeneia*—in the following excerpt from Tarkovsky’s 1970 interview with Naum Abramov:

Cinema is the filmmaker’s experience caught on film. And if this personal experience is really sincerely expressed then the viewer accepts the film. I’ve noticed, from my own experience, if the external, emotional construction of images in a film is based on the filmmaker’s own memory, on the kinship of one’s personal experience with the fabric of the film, then the film will have the power to affect those who see it.

GIANVITO 2006: 35

11 On the role of hieroglyphs in film theory see Botz-Bornstein’s chapter in this volume.

It is “kinship,” a fundamental connection to something beyond the individual self, which allows us to communicate. Kinship is more than a shared system of conventional symbols. The real experience, that is, the truth of the artistic image, will not be grasped by the kind of artist who reduces art to a craft, to a set of techniques. Indeed, Tarkovsky’s injunction of unwavering fidelity to experience demotes to an afterthought any consideration of “technique.”

The techniques often associated with cinematic art that Tarkovsky explicitly rejects can be summarized as follows: (1) montage, (2) symbolism and interpretation (3) plotting and dramatic development, and finally what can be called (4) technical and historical realism.

To begin with, Tarkovsky indicates why he does not endorse Eisenstein’s montage-driven account of film as “thinking in images”:

Eisenstein makes thought into a despot: it leaves no “air,” nothing of the unspoken elusiveness which is perhaps the most captivating quality of all art, and which makes it possible for an individual to relate to a film. I want to make films which carry no oratorical, propagandist speech, but are the occasion for a deeply intimate experience.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 182

Although he refers above all to Eisenstein who at some point even proposed a theory of “dialectical” montage, Tarkovsky’s critique of montage extends to any cinematic approach attempting to create meaning through the process of editing. In rejecting montage, Tarkovsky does not allow the locus of creativity to shift from the film director to the actors. Despite what seems to have been a sincere and very profound appreciation of his actors, Tarkovsky remained a very solid *auteur*. Ultimately, Tarkovsky’s critique of montage seems to be motivated by the worry that such an approach to cinema “over-determines” the cinematic experience. Through its intricate construction of sequences of images, montage attempts to persuade and even oblige the viewer to have a certain experience. Montage cinema turns film into a one-sided affair, where the director attempts to impose a determinate view on the audience:¹²

Moreover Eisenstein’s montage dictum, as I see it, contradicts the very basis of the unique process whereby a film affects an audience. It deprives the person watching of the prerogative of film which has to do with what distinguishes its impact on his consciousness from that of literature or philosophy: namely the opportunity to live through what is

12 For his notion of reality in relation to montage see Tarkovsky 1986: 184–189.

happening on the screen as if it were his own experience imprinted in time upon the screen.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 183¹³

The viewer's ability to "live through what is happening on the screen as if it were his own experience" is predicated upon an understanding that peoples' experiences do not need to be communicated by discursive means; and montage is perhaps cinema's most discursive means. Here Tarkovsky contrasts film with philosophy, insofar as film seems to allow the viewer to "live through ... [an] experience." But in ancient philosophy and in Plotinus in particular, philosophy is an experience, both as a way of life but also as an immediate experience like the experience of art.

Tarkovsky eschews symbolism, at least any symbolism according to which images should represent or refer to something else.¹⁴ Tarkovsky believes that symbolism impoverishes the artistic image, reducing cinema to a discourse, a type of code. Whereas montage might be understood as a species of rhetorical technique, in essence manipulative, symbolism, less reliant on the manipulation of unconscious psychological mechanisms, appears to offer the viewer a degree of freedom to consciously interpret the work. But Tarkovsky not only rejects symbolism insofar as it limits the nature of the experience for the viewer but also because it hinders direct experience of the artistic image, creating a certain discursive mindset in the viewer.¹⁵ Moreover, to reduce film to a

13 See also: "Nor can I accept the notion that editing is the main formative element of film, as the protagonists of 'montage cinema,' following Kuleshov and Eisenstein, maintained in the 'twenties, as if a film was made on the editing table" (114).

14 Tarkovsky does not reject symbolism *per se*. For example, he cites approvingly Vyacheslav Ivanov's work on symbolism. Yet, Tarkovsky glosses Ivanov's "symbol" by "artistic image": "Vyacheslav Ivanov made some extraordinarily penetrating and apt comments on this when he wrote of the wholeness of the artistic image (which he calls "symbol"); "A symbol is only a true symbol when it is inexhaustible and unlimited in its meaning, when it utters in its arcane (hieratic and magical) language of hint and intimation something that cannot be set forth, that does not correspond to words. It has many faces and many thoughts, and in its remotest depths it remains inscrutable (...) It is formed by organic process, like a crystal (...) Indeed it is a monad, and thus constitutionally different from complex and reducible allegories, parables and similes (...). Symbols cannot be stated or explained, and, confronted by their secret meaning in its totality, we are powerless" (Tarkovsky 1986: 47). Compare Tarkovsky's assertion that "art symbolizes the meaning of our existence" (192).

15 "It seems that the cinema-goer has so lost the capacity simply to surrender to an immediate, emotional aesthetic impression that he instantly has to check himself, and ask: "Why? What for? What's the point?" (Tarkovsky 1986: 213).

symbolic discourse would disconnect it from reality, creating, as it were, a kind of idealization removed from things as they really are.¹⁶

In the absence of symbolic discourse to be decoded, Tarkovsky asserts, there is no need to *interpret* his films. The viewer does not access the artistic image by way of a process which deliberately works out meaning. Tarkovsky who frequently expressed interest in East Asian religion and philosophy¹⁷ makes reference to Zen poetry when exposing this thoughts on interpretation:

If you start to search for meaning during the film you will miss everything that happens. The ideal viewer is someone who watches a film like a traveler watching the country he is passing through: because the effect of the artistic image is an extra-mental type of communication. There are some artists who attach symbolic meaning to their images, but that is not possible for me. Zen poets have a good way of dealing with this: they work to eliminate any possibility of interpretation, and in the process a parallel arises between the real world and what the artist creates in his work.

GIANVITO 2006: 68

In this passage Tarkovsky explains how the explicit elimination of symbolism and interpretation creates the conditions in which parallels between reality and the artistic image can emerge.¹⁸ Symbolic and interpretive approaches to cinema undermine the possibility of what Tarkovsky calls “extra-mental communication,” which corresponds to what we are referring to as non-discursive communication.¹⁹

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- 16 The Lacanian distinction between Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic would no doubt be anathema for Tarkovsky.
 - 17 Tarkovsky was very fond of the Daoist flute music (this is at least how he identifies it, Gianvito 2006: 141; cf. Tarkovsky 1986: 240) that he uses in *Nostalgia*. He discusses haiku in *Sculpting in Time* (106) and in an interview published by Gianvito (93). The main character in *The Sacrifice* is fascinated by Japan, listens to shakuhachi music and is wearing a kimono adorned with a *yin yang* symbol as he executes the sacrifice he had promised.
 - 18 At the very end of *Sculpting in Time* Tarkovsky suggests that the production of artistic images is the product of self-surrender: “Finally, I would enjoin the reader—confiding in him utterly—believe that the one thing mankind has ever created in a spirit of self-surrender is the artistic image” (240).
 - 19 Compare Tarkovsky’s approbation of the views of a young woman whose letter concerning his film *Ivan’s Childhood* was forwarded to him: “One woman sent me on a letter written to her by her daughter, and the young girl’s words are, I think, a remarkable statement about artistic creation as an infinitely versatile and subtle form of communication: ‘There’s another kind of language, another form of communication: by means of feeling, and images. That is the contact that stops people being separated from each other, that

Tarkovsky shares with many other film makers and theorists the belief that the specificity of the cinematic art goes beyond the narrative and dramatic elements that it shares with literature and theatre. Although he does not eliminate the narrative from his films altogether, Tarkovsky radically downplays the importance of plot (particularly in *Mirror*, *Stalker*, and *Nostalghia*):²⁰

I was not interested in the development of the plot, in the chain of events—with each film I feel less and less need for them. I have always been interested in a person's inner world, and for me it was far more natural to make a journey into the psychology that informed the hero's life, into the literary and cultural traditions that are the foundation of his spiritual world.... I am interested in man, for he contains a universe within himself; and in order to find expression for the idea, the meaning of life, there is no need to spread behind it, as it were, a canvas crowded with happenings.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 204

In what might seem at first to be a paradox, Tarkovsky sees plot and dramaturgy as a potential distraction from what is really at stake in film, that quintessence of experienced time that he aims to distill. Tarkovsky's repudiation of the importance of narration has some parallel in Plotinus whose writings contrast with Plato's narrative and dramaturgical masterpieces or Aristotle's lectures that often follow pedagogical, investigative and even historical narrative sequence. In relation to these works, Plotinus writings—although evidently related to his lectures—float in a kind of aporetic and contemplative space, above the sequence of wordly happenings. Plotinus refused even to narrate his life events. This has a parallel in his work insofar as Plotinus rarely uses the term *bios* (a decisive notion in both Plato and Aristotle) when discussing

brings down barriers. Will feeling, emotion—these remove obstacles from between people who otherwise stand on opposite sides of a mirror, on opposite sides of a door (...)" (12–13) It is significant that one of Tarkovsky's clearest statements on communication is a citation of a letter forwarded to him, a kind of quotation of a quotation. His approval of a formulation of twice removed is alibi to the fact that real communication is possible. Moreover, the author of the letter talks about communication precisely as the removal of obstacles, echoing that Plotinian idea that communication is about actualizing the communicative possibilities already inherent in the unified structure of reality.

- 20 From a narrative point of view Tarkovsky's earlier films *Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublyov*, are structured more conventionally. Interestingly, in his last film *The Sacrifice*, Tarkovsky not only employs extensive narrative elements but also "stages" the entire picture in a way akin to a theatre production (see Tarkovsky 1986: 222).

“life”—which refers to a narratable life composed of a sequence of wordly events—while he very often uses the word *zôê*—which refers to life in a much more abstract sense, a notion applicable to even those levels of reality that cannot be thought of as a person or even as a historic reality.

Tarkovsky was profoundly weary of attachment to historical or technical detail in film that might inhibit a direct experience of it. Although he did pay a great deal of attention to history in the creation of *Andrei Rublyov*, he took care to not allow any details relating to the period to distract from the meaning of the film, shunning the idea that the actors should speak anything other than contemporary Russian, for example (see Gianvito 2006: 14). He asserts that “in order to achieve the truth of direct observation what one might almost term physiological truth, we had to move away from the truth of archeology and ethnography” (Tarkovsky 1986: 78).²¹ In his remarks on *Solaris*—the film in his *oeuvre* with which he evidently had the most ambiguous relationship²²—Tarkovsky underscores the problem in science fiction which consists in representations of technologies distracting viewers from the more profound dynamic of the film.

A grasp of the interdependence of experience, image, and world seems to be that which lead Tarkovsky to his account of the cinematic art as “sculpting in time.” Tarkovsky’s “sculpting in time” is, I think, precisely an attempt to

21 Compare further remarks Tarkovsky makes on *Andrei Rublyov*: “As for the historical side, we wanted to make the film as if we were dealing with a contemporary. And so historical facts, people, artefacts, had to be seen not as the stuff of future memorials, but as something living, breathing, even every day. Props, costumes, utensils—we didn’t want to look at any of these things with the eye of the historian, the archaeologist, or the ethnographer, collecting museum exhibits. A chair had to be an object on which to sit, not a rare antique” (1986: 35).

22 In part this was due to difficulties in having the screen play approved by Stanislaw Lem and in part by his difficult relationship with Donatas Banionis the actor who played the protagonist Kris Kelvin (see Tarkovsky 1986: 145). His views on science fiction are discussed in Gianvito 2006: 34–37. He writes, “For some reason, in all the science-fiction films I’ve seen, the filmmakers force the viewer to examine the details of the material structure of the future. More than that, sometimes, like Kubrick, they call their own films premonitions. It’s unbelievable! 2001: A Space Odyssey is phony on many points even for specialists. For a true work of art the fake must be eliminated. I would like to shoot *Solaris* in a way that the viewer would be unaware of any exoticism. Of course, I am referring to the exoticism of technology (...). That means to create psychologically, not an exotic but a real, everyday environment that would be conveyed to the viewer through the perception of the film’s characters. That’s why a detailed “examination” of the technological processes of the future transforms the emotional foundation of a film as a work of art, into a lifeless schema with only pretensions to truth” (Gianvito 2006: 36; see also p. 173).

explain non-discursive communication. Like Plotinus, Tarkovsky thinks that an image is capable of serving as a vehicle of communication. But, in contrast to Plotinus, Tarkovsky sees the artistic image as a distillation of the temporal moving images of normal experiential reality. Tarkovsky's approach is, then, in some sense more empirical than that of Plotinus. However, the two thinkers are both committed to a view of reality as fundamentally unified. On the one hand, Tarkovsky suggests that the phenomenal reality captured on film is simply a piece of reality; on the other, he believes that phenomenal reality extends to a deeper psychological and metaphysical reality.

Tarkovsky's rejection of the discursive elements of cinematic art should be understood, at least in part, as a rejection of approaches privileging discrete and contrasting elements (shots, symbols, characters, and moments in a plot) in favor of treating film primarily and as much as possible as a whole. His editing procedure, which, as we saw, he contrasts with Eisenstein's dialectical montage, involves an accumulation of shots. Insofar as they are mutually implicit, the shots composing the film somehow lose their distinctness in the whole:

As for editing, my principle is the following. The film is like a river; the editing must be infinitely spontaneous, like nature itself. (...) For me, the isolated shot, by itself is senseless. It acquires its completeness only through the fact that it is part of a whole. Better yet—it already contains that which will happen after it.

GIANVITO 226: 19–20

The primacy of wholeness over distinctly identifiable elements may help us understand why, while eschewing symbolism, Tarkovsky is relatively comfortable with the idea of metaphor.²³ A metaphor creates a communicative possibility which is free of discursive machinations.

Tarkovsky has a nuanced attitude towards his audiences. He certainly does not see those to whom he addresses his work as an object of persuasion or entertainment, but rather as Plotinus might say, "sister souls," to be met in a space opened up by the artistic image. Although he expressly points out that he formulates his ideas via explicit critique of others ideas, in his films Tarkovsky strives for some kind of harmony with the viewer:

The only manner in which a creative idea should enter the awareness of the audience is via the trust the creator has in his audience. A dialogue

23 On Tarkovsky's understanding of the difference between symbol and metaphor see Gianvito 2006: 85–86.

in which audience and creator are equal partners has to be developed. There is no other approach; even if something is absolutely self-evident to the creator it is entirely wrong to try and force this into the audience's mind. The aesthetic ideas generated by the viewers have to be accommodated, but one must never compromise and neglect the duty to create modern cinema.

GIANVITO 2006:10

Although Tarkovsky thinks that film emerges from the experience of the director, he does not believe that what is communicated ultimately belongs to the director as his own possession. At one point Tarkovsky even talks about his films as "prayers":

My films are not a personal expression but a prayer. (...) As if I were lighting a candle in front of an icon, or placing a bouquet of flowers before it. The spectator always ends up understanding when you are sincere in what you are telling him. I don't invent any language to appear simpler, stupider, or smarter. A lack of honesty would destroy the dialogue.

GIANVITO 2006:175

For Tarkovsky, then, the absence of a special discursive language coincides with an honesty grounding the communicative potential of his film. Tarkovsky reports of a cleaning woman addressing a group of intellectuals discussing *Mirror*: "This simple woman had understood it all" (Gianvito 2006: 168).

Tarkovsky also illustrates his understanding of non-discursive communication in his films. At the very beginning of *Mirror* we see a young man in the process of being liberated by hypnosis from a speech impediment. By the end of the short scene which occurs before the title of the film appears, we hear the young man say: "I can speak" (*ya mogu govorit*). The film is thus presented as a kind of communicative action. One expects a narrative, but instead encounters a variety of scenes and memories punctuated by poetry (of Arseni Tarkovsky). Tarkovsky's non-discursive communication is poetic. It is as if *Mirror* declares "to really speak, is to communicate poetically."²⁴ In fact, Tarkovsky thinks that the poetic—or poetic communication—allows the spectator to become active: "Through poetic connection feeling is heightened and the spectator is

24 Compare Tarkovsky on poetry: "There are some aspects of life that can only be represented through poetry. But this is where directors very often try to use, conventional gimmickry instead of poetic logic" (Tarkovsky 1986: 30).

made more active. He becomes a participant in the process of discovering life, unsupported by ready-made deductions from the plot or ineluctable pointers by the author" (Tarkovsky 1986: 20).

Tarkovsky's conception of non-discursive communication is also at work in *Andrei Rublyov*. Kirill, something of the antagonist, is presented as a discursive thinker but in a thoroughly pejorative light since he is an intellectual manipulator, a veritable sophist in the Platonic sense. Upon meeting Theophanes the Greek, Kirill cites approvingly the notion that "by naming things you grasp their essence" and his envy of Andrei Rublyov, whose work he subtly belittles in his discussion with Theophanes, becomes manifest. Impressed by Kirill's erudition, Theophanes refers to Kirill as a "philosopher." And when Theophanes asks that Kirill work for him, Kirill suggests that Theophanes submit his request in the presence of Andrei Rublyov, so that the latter may witness Kirill's success. Kirill is thus portrayed not only as a technically oriented critic—a Beckmesser—but also as a manipulator of communicative means.

In *Stalker* there are various scenes of intense dialogue and trialogue. Apart from all the other possible meanings of "the zone," it is clearly a place where a kind of communication can occur that cannot occur elsewhere. It is as if in the zone the normal rules of communication are suspended and new possibilities of understanding emerge.

In *Nostalgia* the action of the entire film transpires under the shadow of a kind of suspension of communication between Andrei Gorchakov and his interpreter Eugenia, a sort of communicative *ne vstrech* (Russian for "non meeting"). The theme of poetic discourse is broached explicitly when Eugenia tells Andrei that she is reading a book of poetry by none other than Arseni Tarkovsky, announcement which provokes Andrei to tell her to throw the book away since poetry cannot be translated. Andrei's relationship with Domenico, a kind of holy fool,²⁵ is characterized by a mysterious kinship which has Andrei see himself as Dominico, and ultimately take over Domenico's mission of carrying a lit candle across the mineral baths, a task that Domenico was unable to perform and which ultimately costs Andrei his life.

Having imagined that she allowed a typographic error to go to press, the mother figure in *Mirror*, a proof-reader, runs through the rain back to the publishing house in the hope that she may correct the slip up before it is printed. Although her error was only imagined, we get the impression that the written word is unreliable, that it is fluid and cannot adequately capture truth. In the

25 On Tarkovsky's understanding of the Holy fool see Tarkovsky 1986: 226.

same film we listen in on a telephone conversation between Alexei and his mother. She asks about his voice which is hoarse and he suggests that perhaps he is afflicted by a case of strep throat. He hasn't spoken in three days, Alexei tells his mother. But he remarks that sometimes it is good to be silent, because "words can't communicate everything that one feels."

Sacrifice features a relatively large cast of characters and is structured around many interesting dialogues. However, most prominent in this film are the little boy's silence as he recovers from a throat operation and Alexander's monologues which, in the face of what seems to be impending nuclear doom, are transmuted into prayer, and this from a character who had earlier said "we don't even know how to pray anymore." Finally, even these prayers cease as Alexander assumes his vow of silence. He has exchanged places with his son. It is as if through suffering and renunciation of the inauthentic self real communication becomes possible.

An episode from Tarkovsky's biography gives us some insight into his own experience of language. Biographies of Tarkovsky often suggest that having spent some time studying Arabic at the Moscow Institute for Oriental Studies he simply lost interest by the time he dropped out and joined a geological expedition before entering the prestigious Moscow film academy in 1954. In fact, Tarkovsky's characterization of the Arabic language is revealing. He reports in an interview,

In 1952 I entered the Institute for Oriental Studies, where I studied Arabic. I left the Institute after two years because I became aware of the fact that it did not suit me. (...) Do you know Arabic? It's a mathematical language. Everything in it obeys laws wherein you introduce root words in order to obtain a new declination,²⁶ or a new grammatical state. All of this was not for me.

GIANVITO 2006: 17

The implication is of course is that the "mathematical" nature of Arabic did not accord with Tarkovsky's interests. One wonders whether Tarkovsky's experience with Arabic, the great poetic traditions of which he must have been at least vaguely aware, contributed to his understanding of the relations between art, language and logic.

26 This should probably read "verbal form" since Tarkovsky is probably referring to the fact that essentially all Arabic words including nouns and verbs are built up from tri- (and sometimes quadri) lateral consonant roots according to a very complex system of derivation.

1.3 *Communication and the Inner Self in Plotinus and Tarkovsky*

The very basis of the possibility of non-discursive communication in both Plotinus and Tarkovsky is the notion that the truth or substance of the inner person goes beyond the individual. In Plotinus there is an elaborate metaphysical structure supporting this—reinforced by relentless arguments against the idea that the soul is really individual. In Plotinus, access to the true inner person occurs through the appreciation of inner beauty, which can only be perceived once the soul has been purified by virtue. Having rejected the position according to which beauty is a matter of harmonious proportions Plotinus writes

So let us go back to the beginning and state what the primary beauty in bodies really is. It is something which we become aware of even at first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood it, recognizes and welcomes it and as it were adapts itself to it. But when it encounters the ugly it shrinks back and rejects it and turns away from it and is out of tune and alienated from it. Our explanation of this is that the soul, since it is by nature what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it (*suggenes*) or a trace of its kindred reality (*ikhnos tou suggenous*), is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions. (I 6, 1, 2, 1–9)

Striking in this passage is the phenomenological description of the experiences of beauty and ugliness. The philosopher can only explain discursively how this experience—of which we are aware even “at first glance”—works (“Our explanation of this is that ...”). But it is the experience itself which is at the heart of Plotinus’ philosophy. What makes communication possible is a shared relation to—a kinship which we experience with—higher realities. In other words, the recognition of external beauty is possible only because we have something of this beauty in us. The task of the philosopher is, then, to make one aware of what is already present.

The vision of beauty in which people can share goes beyond what is often understood to be the nature of philosophical recognition of truth. It is, namely, not a dispassionate awareness of truth, but involves an overwhelming emotional engagement. Here Plotinus draws on the notion of *erôs* which we find developed by Plato in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. Plotinus describes the emotional states associated with the vision of the beauty thus:

But there must be those who see this beauty by that with which the soul sees things of this sort, and when they see it they must be delighted and

overwhelmed and excited much more than by those beauties we spoke of before, since now it is true beauty they are grasping. These experiences must occur whenever there is contact with any sort of beautiful thing, wonder shock of delight and longing and passion and a happy excitement. One can have these experiences by contact with invisible beauties, and souls do have them, practically all, but particularly those who are more passionately in love with the invisible, just as with bodies all see them, but all are not stung as sharply, but some, who are called lovers, are most of all. (I 6, 1, 4, 15–22)

Tarkovsky's insistence on the goodness in his characters in terms of conscience and honesty overlaps significantly with Plotinus's understanding of virtue as a beauty in the soul. The most important principle in Tarkovsky's thought on filmmaking is his notion that the filmmaker must work in accord with absolute fidelity to his or her inner experience. This principle guides *Mirror* in a very obvious way and comes to fruition in *Nostalghia*.²⁷ Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky aim thus to communicate a primary experience of the most important realities. They coax the reader or audience as a friend or companion rather than as an opponent or an abstractly conceived public who should be taught or persuaded by way of narrative, structured argument or any other blunt kinds of discourse.

2 Catharsis, Wonder and the Experience of the Good

2.1 *Purification and Reversal of Values*

Plotinus often discusses the task of philosophy in terms of "purification" (*katharsis*). And while at times Plotinus does give us reason to think of purification in rather dualistic terms (most often inspired by certain passages of Plato's *Phaedo*), his notion of *katharsis* is generally subtle. Already in his first treatise, Plotinus generalizes the notion of purification applying it to virtue in general: "For, as was said in old times, self-control, and courage and every virtue, is a purification, and so is even wisdom itself" (I 6, 1, 6, 1). Various passages in Plotinus

27 In the latter film Tarkovsky was able to articulate his method of creating art by way of a total fidelity to inner experience. He reports his experience upon viewing the completed film as follows: "I was at once astounded and delighted, because what had been imprinted on film, and was now revealed to me for the first time in the darkness of the cinema, proved that my reflections about how the art of the screen is able, and even called, to become a matrix of the individual soul, to convey unique human experience, were not just the fruit of idle speculation but a reality, which here was unrolling incontrovertibly before my eyes..." (Tarkovsky 1986: 204).

allow us to understand catharsis in terms of the overcoming of egoism. And often catharsis in Plotinus can be understood as kind of reversal of values. Plotinus suggests that what in one sense is a failure is in another a victory:

Here the greatest, the ultimate contest (*agôn*) is set before our souls; all our toil and trouble is for this, not to be left without a share in the best of visions. The man who attains this is blessed in seeing that “blessed sight,” and he who fails (*ho mê tukhôn*) to attain it has failed utterly (*atukhês*). A man has not failed if he fails to win beauty of colors or bodies, or power or office or kingship even, but if he fails to win this and only this. For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see. (I 6, 1, 7, 30–39)

Here Plotinus picks up the theme of moral heroism from Plato (present also in Aristotle, but figuring most prominently in Cynicism and Stoicism). Plotinus explains that the task of his philosophy can coincide in some sense with failure according to worldly values. Although he speaks in these terms in other contexts,²⁸ here in I 6, 1 it is most clear that one who does not have a vision of the good and beautiful is truly unfortunate.

This Plotinian reversal of values corresponds in some sense to Tarkovsky's interest in what he calls the “weak man” who is a “loser” in the terms of worldly values but heroic at the level of the spiritual. This theme is very prominent in *Stalker* and *Nostalghia* but also figures in *Sacrifice*. The character Stalker seems at times a fraud and a bumbler to his clients, the professor and the writer, and even his success as a husband and father relies entirely on his wife's patience and fidelity. In *Nostalghia* Andrei is a failed lover, upbraided as such by Eugenia whose advances he rebuffs, but he assumes the spiritual challenge presented to him by Domenico. Tarkovsky writes:

In *Nostalghia* I wanted to pursue the theme of the “weak” man who is no fighter in terms of his outward attributes but whom I nonetheless see as a victor in this life. Stalker delivers a monologue in defense of that weakness that is the true price and hope of life. I have always liked people who can't adapt themselves pragmatically. There have never been any heroes in my films (apart from perhaps Ivan) but there have always been people

28 For example at the very end of IV 3, 27, 32, 25–27: “And Homer's Heracles might talk about his heroic deeds; but the man who thinks these of little account and has migrated to a holier place, and has been stronger than Heracles in the contexts in which the wise compete,—”.

whose strength lies in their spiritual conviction and who take upon themselves a responsibility for others (and this of course includes Ivan). Such people are often rather like children, only with the motivation of adults; from a common-sense point of view their position is unrealistic as well as selfless.

TARKOVSKY 1986: 207

At the end of *The Sacrifice* Alexander, the protagonist, whose very name suggests heroism, ends up being taken away as a psychiatric patient. In Tarkovsky's films the failings of the would-be heroes may seem despairing. But Tarkovsky's cinema is always oriented to the good despite the bleakness that often inhabits his screen, since the struggle with despair can be cathartic rather than despairing. According to the Russian cineaste, art must necessarily be motivated by a concern for beauty and the good. The negative moment in his work is in fact nothing less than a cathartic "destruction," as he himself calls it. He responds in an interview to a suggestion that *Stalker* is motivated by despair:

I don't believe a work of art can be based on this type of emotion. It has to have a positive, spiritual meaning and contain hope and faith. I don't think my film is despairing, or if it is, it isn't a work. Even if it contains moments of despair, it still rises above them. It's a sort of catharsis. It's a tragedy and tragedy isn't despairing. It's a sort of destruction, which leaves the view with a sense of hope, because of the catharsis that Aristotle describes. Tragedy purifies man.

GIANVITO 2006: 60

Tarkovsky's unrealized project to make a version of *Hamlet* for the screen is motivated by the same interest in cathartic destruction. One senses here Tarkovsky's kinship with Dostoyevsky whose "existentialism" was tempered by the conviction that "only beauty can save the world." Plotinus' remarks on the discovery of beauty in I 6, 1 and V 8, 31 suggest that Plotinus might agree with Dostoyevsky, but for Plotinus beauty has already, as it were, saved the world.²⁹

2.2 *Aporia, Thaumata and the Good*

One of the virtues of the notion of *aporia* is its polysemy. It can refer to a kind of frustrating puzzlement spurring on investigation, reaffirming and clarifying

29 Plotinus is thoroughly committed to a picture of the universe embedded in a providential order (see III 2, 47—III 3, 48).

intellectual goals; but it can also refer to a more open state of questioning that does not necessarily demand resolution. Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky can be seen as aporetic thinkers. However, I suggest that the “aporetic” moment in their work be understood in relation to a particular sense of “wonder.”

It is well known that both Plato and Aristotle see the source or beginning of philosophy in *thauma*. If for both Plato and Aristotle philosophy begins in wonder (*thauma*), wonder is also in some sense a goal for Plotinus and Tarkovsky. That is, the non-discursive communication that, as I argue, is at issue in their work, is of an indeterminate experience containing some kind of transcendent truth. A moment of wonder coincides, according to Plotinus, with the awareness of the presence of the Good (and the beautiful) in the immediate world of experience. One “wonders” at the intelligibility that permeates all levels of reality. This is why the notion of *thauma* is a key element in his argument against the Gnostics.³⁰ But wonder also induces one to move “upward” in the spiritual universe. We might say that wonder (*thauma*) effects conversion (*epistrophê*) insofar as it corresponds to an awareness (or the awakening of an awareness) that there is something beyond appearances. Plotinus explains how one seeks the source of that which causes wonder:

And certainly, one who looks up to the sky and sees the light of the stars thinks of their maker and seeks him, so the man who has contemplated the intelligible world and observed it closely and wondered (*ethaumase*) at it must seek its maker, too, and enquire who it is who has brought into being something like this, and how, he who produced a son like Intellect, a beautiful boy filled full from himself. (III 8, 30, 11, 33–39)

But one need not even think of creation or generation. Plotinus describes how simply coming to awareness of the unity in diversity involves wonder:

In this it is also a wonder (*to thauma*) how that which is one in this way is many and one. For in the case of bodies it has been agreed that the same body is one and many; for the same one [can be divided] to infinity, and its color is different from its shape; for they are in fact separated. But if someone takes one soul, without special separation of parts, without magnitude, supremely simple, as it will seem at the first application of the mind to it, how would one expect to find that it was after all many?

VI 2, 43, 4, 17–24, trans. ARMSTRONG modified

30 See e.g. II 9, 33, 9, 56–49 and 14, 13–17. Compare also III 3, 48, 3, 30–31: “See how far what has come into being stands from its origin, and yet, it is a wonder!”

Indeed, both creation and unity can be understood as a kind of presence of the intelligible. For Plotinus the omni-presence of Intellect, beauty and the Good is a “wonder”:

But as it is, because it is Intellect, it sees him, when it does see him, with that of it which is not Intellect. It is really a wonder (*thauma*) how he is present without having come, and how, though he is nowhere, there is nowhere where he is not. One can, certainly be surprised (*thaumasai*) in this way at the first moment, but one who knows would be surprised (*thaumasai*) if the opposite was true; but, rather, the opposite could not even happen for one to be surprised at (*thaumasê*). (v 5, 32, 8, 22–27)

This account of wonder at the presence of intellect is in fact part of a larger passage of text in which Plotinus attempts to explain how the Intellect perceives both internal and external light in a way in which we can participate. The overall thesis of v 3, 49 is that true self-knowledge is located at the level of the Intellect. In v 3, 49 Plotinus argues that the Intellect must “see itself.” In a sense, we become part of the self-knowledge of the intelligible. Plotinus explains how we can perceive the intellect:

Who then will tell what it is like? The seer: and the Intellect is the seer. For here below also sight, since it is light, or rather united with light, sees light: for it sees colors; but in the intelligible world seeing is not through another [medium], but through itself, because it is not [directed] outside. Intellect therefore sees one light with another, not through another. Light then sees another light: it therefore itself sees itself. And this light shining in the soul illuminates it; that is, it makes it intelligent; that is, it makes it like itself, the light above (v 3, 49, 8, 18–25)

Insofar as the souls in Plotinus are always in part “undescended,” that is, remain attached to the intellect, they take part in this self-knowing vision and this is precisely what occurs in communication.

Tarkovsky's films are often very puzzling. As we have seen, Tarkovsky deliberately leaves room in his films for the viewer to become an active participant. Tarkovsky seems to do so precisely in order to create, or rather, recreate the kind of experience that can be characterized by the term wonder. In fact, I suggest that, although he does not say so explicitly, the notion of wonder is related to what Tarkovsky attempts to capture in his “artistic image” (1986: 104–112). As is already clear, Tarkovsky has no use for the idea that cinema should entertain or shock the viewer in any gratuitous manner. Tarkovsky indicates that he puts

questioning at the center of his work as a film maker: “What I wanted to do was to pose questions and demonstrate problems that go to the very heart of our lives, and thus to bring the audience back to the dormant, parched sources of our existence” (228). And for Tarkovsky the question seems to be relatively independent of the answers they might seek:

Art should be there to remind man that he is a spiritual being, that he is part of an infinitely larger spirit to which he will return in the end. If he’s interested in these questions, if he simply asks himself these questions, he’s already saved spiritually. It’s not the answer that’s important. I know that from the moment man begins asking the question he will be unable to live as he has before.

GIANVITO 226:174

In the end, the questioning and wonder that Tarkovsky believes that art should evoke implies an ethical and moral reality. According to Tarkovsky, questions concerning ultimately reality will change the way people live. It is sufficient to adopt the aporetic stance.

The aporetic approaches developed by Plotinus and Tarkovsky aim to create an openness to an experience of a reality—that is, a state of wonder—which requires no particular theoretical key to unlock. Wonder is a key to non-discursive communication. If *aporia* is “pre-discursive” in some sense, then *thauma* fixes a non-discursive element into the aporetic experience, insofar as *thauma* is not something that can be simply overcome but rather inhabits an experience from the beginning to the end. Therefore, both Plotinus and Tarkovsky attempt to maintain wonder. It orients one towards the good while recognizing that one cannot simply grasp or communicate the Good as an object.

2.3 *Images of the Good and the Transparency of Reality*

Plotinus discusses every level of spiritual reality—Soul, Intellect and the One—in terms of light. The properties of light—already in part enumerated by Plato in book VI of the *Republic*—are its visibility, the fact that it makes other things visible, and its ability to sustain life in things. Light also has the capacity to be present continuously and in a way that appears at least to be almost incorporeal. Therefore light serves well for Plotinus in representing spiritual or intelligible realities. Moreover, light contributes to the possibilities of explaining how something can be both one and many, a constant challenge for Plotinus—(much more so than for Plato). Plotinus avails himself of the image of light when he wishes to illustrate the manner in which all soul is one yet

appears divided among bodies, writing of individual souls that “being fastened by their edges on their upper side, they strike down this way and that, like light which, just when it reaches the earth, divides itself among houses and is not divided, but is one none the less” (IV 3, 27, 4, 18–21). Light seems to relativize the importance of certain phenomena: in this image, the houses become ancillary to the light rather than the other way around. Light, as it were, desubstantializes corporeal things.

Conspicuous in all of his films is Tarkovsky's use of images of water. These are often images of standing bodies of water (the small lake around which Kris Kelvin walks at the beginning of *Solaris*; the three women walking towards the lake at the beginning of *Nostalghia*; *Nostalghia* has at its heart the mineral bath; *The Sacrifice* takes place at the seaside in a kind of marsh). There are very frequent images of rain in Tarkovsky's films (the frantic return to the publishing house and the house burning under the rain in *Mirror* as well as the frequent rain showers in *Nostalghia*) while *Ivan's Childhood* and *Stalker* both involve the navigation through swampland (something similar occurs in *The Sacrifice*). In *Stalker* some of the most striking images involve Stalker himself lying, even sleeping in or beside shallow water; a similar image occurs at the end of *The Sacrifice*.

Although, as we have seen, Tarkovsky rejected the idea that water serves as a “symbol” in his work, it is possible with reference to his conception of the artistic image, to understand why images of water so often serve in important scenes in his films. Tarkovsky consistently uses images of water inside buildings during significant moments. One such scene occurs in a dream sequence in *Mirror* where the narrator's mother is washing her hair. As she lifts her head, the long hair covering her face, the whole scene is overcome with water to a point where pieces of the ceiling begin to collapse under its dissolving power. It is as if water is for Tarkovsky like light in Plotinus: it is a dematerializing medium. Another scene in which water transpierces a building occurs in *Nostalghia* towards the end of the Andrei's visit to Domenico's house. Water penetrates through the dilapidated ceiling and we can read on the wall: “1 + 1 = 1,” an echo of the assertion which at the beginning of their conversation Domenico had illustrated with the help of drops of olive oil. Like Plotinus' light, Tarkovsky's water is a unified and unifying element. There is another scene in *Nostalghia* where Andrei wades into a roofless church that has become a sacred lake of sorts, imbibes what seems to be vodka (which in fact means “little water”), talks to a young girl who calls herself Angela—Angel, in Italian—then sleeps and dreams while a book (presumably the book of poetry that Eugenia was reading) burns beside his head in the little fire he had made. The scene in this partly submerged roofless little church is pivotal in the film. We might say that

Andrei is converted as he wades in the waters. Also in *Stalker* the room where desires are granted—the goal of the trek through “the zone”—is full of water. Throughout *Stalker* we see human made artifacts—including firearms, and clocks—submerged in shallow water, as if they are dissolved. In *Stalker* the Professor, having given up his project to destroy the room in the zone, throws the components of his bomb into the water. And a pivotal discussion between the three takes place in a room to which the viewer has access only through a door framed by a textured wall, a room whose floorboards seem almost to be floating on water. If in other scenes water dissolves buildings from above, in *Stalker* it does so also from below.

The marvelous images of the roofless church in *Nostalghia* seem to imply the relativity of corporeal things: the swamped church where Andrei keeps vigil one night—and the final shot of the film in which Andrei is framed with Domenico's dog in front of his Russian house and both are framed in the church ruin. This last scene of interpenetration seems to respond to Domenico's pleas for unity as well as to Andrei's pessimistic remarks about intercultural communication when he arrives at the hotel with Eugenia at the very beginning of the film. Perhaps we can understand Tarkovsky's fascination with textured walls in the sense that that which is apparently opaque and limiting is ultimately soluble or even potentially transparent. In any case, the many scenes in Tarkovsky's films taking place in marsh or swampland suggest that even the earth is soluble.

Conclusion

Neither Plotinus nor Tarkovsky see the Good as accessible to dogmatic or discursive metaphysics. On the contrary, the accounts of the Good that we find in Plotinus and Tarkovsky are deliberately aporetic and experiential; ultimately, the Good can only be known and communicated by non-discursive means. When Tarkovsky writes that “the aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good” (Tarkovsky 1988: 43) one is reminded of a notion from Pierre Hadot, according to which, in general, the texts of ancient philosophers should be understood as spiritual exercises. Both Plotinus and Tarkovsky intend to provoke a kind of wonder drawing the soul towards beauty and the good. The process of turning towards and approaching the Good is also a moral and ethical matter implying purification or catharsis and the reversal of established values. But in order to be oriented towards the Good one must maintain an attitude of wonder including questioning and emotional engagement—which is incompatible with

certain kinds of discursive means and corresponding theoretical positions. This is why their “methods” are largely negative.

Tarkovsky, no doubt in part on account of the Neoplatonic heritage in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, is able to create film which is genuinely philosophical in a Plotinian sense. He philosophizes in film by creating an experience that provokes questions about ultimate reality and a sense of wonder oriented towards the Good. And he does so in a way that allows us to better understand Plotinus’ theory of art. Tarkovsky’s inimitable personal approach to cinema shows us how what sometimes might seem to be a rather abstract view of reality in Plotinus can in fact illuminate the vicissitudes of lived individual reality. Plotinus gives us tools—particularly with his account of the self-knowledge of the Intellect—to better understand how Tarkovsky’s artistic image functions as a non-discursive means of communication.

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Images of a Moving Self: Plotinus and Bruce Nauman

Panayiota Vassilopoulou

What follows is an exploration of the relation between Plotinus' thought and the work of Bruce Nauman, one of the most prolific and controversial artists of our times. My primary aim is to examine the way in which Nauman and Plotinus engage in a similar problematic concerning the relation between art and self, between the project of being a self and the project of being an artist. Both Plotinus' and Nauman's works are informed by a concentrated interest in the relationship between selfhood and art. A distinctive mark of Plotinus' philosophy is a pioneering account of soul and selfhood developed in tandem with a carefully constructed defence of creativity and art. Nauman's work is particularly pertinent because the issue of the self is a constant thematic pre-occupation explored, in ways informed by Nauman's highly self-reflective attitude towards (his) art, in a variety of media and their combinations, from short films and video art, to photographs, performance pieces, installations, or sculptures.

There have been various attempts to bring Plotinian philosophy into contact with contemporary aesthetics and art, although very rarely, if at all, with video art and film.¹ Regardless of their particular aims, these attempts raise the issue of the relevance of Plotinus' thought for understanding the changes in the practice and theory of art triggered by the various artistic movements of the late 19th and early 20th century.² This relevance is thus assessed by the extent to which the deployment of Plotinian thought can enrich our understanding of contemporary art. Hence the movement of understanding in this kind of approach is invariably one-way: from Plotinus to contemporary art. In this chapter I will juxtapose Plotinus and Nauman in an attempt to enrich our understanding of both figures. This attempt does not consist in an historical enquiry: there is no evidence that Nauman has read Plotinus, and there are no direct historical links connecting them. Rather, I argue, that if, in some properly

1 One such rare occasion linking Plotinus to film is Botz-Bornstein (2004).

2 For example, Alexandrakis 2002, focuses on the relevance of Plotinus' notion of beauty in a contemporary context; Beierwaltes 2002, offers a broader overview of selected relevant themes.

qualified sense, both Plotinus and Nauman engage with the same problematic, namely the question of selfhood, then the similarities and differences between their respective engagements with it are not just illuminating of Nauman's creative output, but they can also shed some light on Plotinus' thought.

The first section presents a synoptic overview of Plotinus' conception of art and Nauman's artistic project, thus setting the stage for the encounter between a philosopher and an artist. The second section outlines the problematic of human selfhood and its connection with art both in Plotinus and Nauman. With this necessary context in place, the third section proceeds to the discussion of Nauman's engagement with the issue of the self, with constant reference to relevant Plotinian themes, through an examination of three particularly pertinent and interconnected works, delivered in different media. At its core lies the interpretation of *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1970), an installation that relies heavily on video art, informed and further enriched by the discussion of *From Hand to Mouth* (1967) and *Lighted Performance Box* (1969).

1 Philosophy and Art

Plotinus' reflections on art are embedded within a broader philosophical discourse on beauty, which in turn has a systematic function in the context of Plotinus' metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology. *Prima facie*, this is hardly a promising starting point for establishing the relevance of a Plotinian framework with regard to contemporary art, since its philosophical presuppositions are quite foreign to the metaphysical principles of Neoplatonism. Plotinus adopts a broader notion of beauty than the modern one, which, after Kant, restricts beauty to sensibility; and he treats art as belonging to the order of nature, in contrast to the contemporary understanding of art that, after Hegel, places it firmly within history (Hegel 1975: 2, 9–11). However, the very fact that Plotinus elaborates his conception of art on the basis of systematic philosophical considerations, without actually taking into account the specific characteristics of works of art or artistic practices historically available to him, strengthens surprisingly the prospect of establishing the relevance that his reflections on art may have for us today.

Consider in this light Plotinus' well-known defence of art against its nameless "despisers," a passage that encapsulates the essence of his understanding of art:

But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature, we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitations

too. Then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles from which nature derives; (...) For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible.³

Enn. v 8, 1, 32–41

In this passage, it is relatively easy to disregard the art-historical implications of the reference to Pheidias' statue of Zeus. Plotinus (who most probably had not actually seen the statue) merely uses it as an example of a work of art widely considered to be successful, without drawing any normative conclusions regarding the acceptable form, content, or medium of works of art.⁴ It is rather more difficult to disregard Plotinus' metaphysical assumption, i.e., the Platonic claim that sensible nature in general should be conceived as an image that imitates a beautiful intelligible world, and its immediate implication with regard to art that the norm of the successful work of art is the sensible presentation of this beauty, already visible in natural objects.

However, this passage already suggests two important points for the interpretation of this implication. First, it is not the primary function of art to present in some way sensible objects: nothing material is, for Plotinus, beautiful in itself and thus worthy of artistic imitation. This is because, second, Plotinian beauty is not essentially a matter of some (definite or indefinite) sensible characteristic of an object stimulating the spectator in the appropriate (pleasurable) way,⁵ but rather a question of the success with which sensible objects can be naturally or artificially motivated to exhibit intelligible content. In other words, for Plotinus, art is essentially symbolic or conceptual, it presents meanings not things. Accordingly, works of art should be considered as "metaphors," "translations," "symbols" or "interpretations" of meanings in sensible or material terms, to be judged not on the basis of any notion of verisimilitude (their adequacy to their apparent objects within the order of sensibility), but

3 Plotinus' text is that of Henry and Schwyzer 1964–82, and translations follow, with frequent revisions, Armstrong 1966–88.

4 For a historical examination of the issues raised by this passage, see Kuisma 2003: 83–131, including additional references to the relevant literature (Plotinus' conventional use of Pheidias' statue is documented in 120–122).

5 Plotinus argues explicitly against an understanding of beauty in terms of sensible (formal or material) qualities in I 6, 1 and VI 7, 22. He notes the intimate link between beauty and pleasure (e.g., in I 6, 1, 18–19; 2 2–4; 4 13–18), but attributes this pleasure to the affinity that the spectator's soul feels for the intelligible content made sensibly present through the form of the beautiful object (see I 6, 3, 1–9).

rather in terms of the “metaphoric” effectiveness of the link to meaning they establish.⁶

This conception of art can be further illuminated if we situate it within Plotinus’ understanding of human creativity in general. Plotinus clearly subordinates the practical capacities and interests of the human subject to her theoretical ones by claiming both that the theoretical availability of an object is a necessary condition for its successful creation, and that the essential purpose of the creation of an object is to make it available to its creator as an object of theoretical contemplation.⁷ These claims, implicated in Plotinus’ “defence” of the artist as someone who has prior theoretical access to the intelligible item she wants to “translate” into sensible terms, clearly imply that creative activity cannot possess any value of its own, since it is not undertaken for its own sake, but rather so that “the finished product would be an object or a form of contemplation” (III 8, 7, 8–10). One could indeed wonder what the point of any creative activity of this kind is, since its purpose seems to be the contemplative recovery of a theoretical object already available at the beginning of the creative process. How can Plotinus assert at the same time that one has to know something in order to make it and to make it in order to know it?

One way to resolve this tension at a broad metaphysical level would be to say that Zeus wills to make himself visible, assigning thus to artists this mediating task. Differently put, meaning, even if otherwise available through philosophical contemplation in its pure intelligibility, must be “interpreted” in sensible or material configurations, so that nothing remains without its proper share of meaning in the whole of reality.⁸ Another way would be to account for the function of art (or other practical activities) with reference to agents who, although motivated by a desire to contemplate, cannot satisfy it directly, and thus “what they cannot get by going straight to it, so to speak, they seek to obtain by going round about” (III 8, 6, 1–4). According to Plotinus, what characterises these agents is a certain deficiency, an inability to satisfy their contemplative interests internally through pure thinking. For this reason, they have to “utter” (*pro-pherein* as in *meta-pherein*), articulate, or express through creative projects the relevant objects, “with a view to examining, trying to learn

6 For a more elaborate discussion of the claims made here about Plotinus’ conception of art, and his notion of creativity, see Vassilopoulou 2014: 493–498.

7 “Some wisdom makes all the things which have come into being, whether they are products of art or nature” (V 8, 5, 1–3), while “action is for the sake of contemplation and vision, so that for men of action, too, contemplation is the goal” (III 8, 6, 1–2).

8 “Creating is bringing a form into being, and this is filling all things with contemplation” (III 8, 7, 22–23); cf. IV 7, 13, 5–7, I 6, 7, 31–33.

thoroughly" (III 8, 6, 28–29) what in a sense they already "possess," even if they cannot have it directly available as "present in their soul" (III 8, 6, 6). In this case, the object is not sufficiently known at the beginning of the creative process to guide it securely; however, it is available as an intimation strong enough to prompt and orientate a creative process aiming at its clarification.

These remarks give us a sense of Plotinus' conception of art and enable us to address the issue of its broad applicability to contemporary art. One way to assess it is by comparing Plotinus' conception with substantive conceptions of art that take into account contemporary developments in the art world. A good example would be Arthur Danto's conditions for art: "first that works of art are always about something, and hence have a content or meaning; and second that to be a work of art something had to embody its meaning" (Danto 2000: 132), i.e., "to *show* what [it is] about" (Danto 2000: 133). Or, in Noël Carroll's gloss, "to discover a mode of presentation that is intended to be appropriate to its meaning" (Carroll 1997: 386).

Danto's conception seems particularly suited to contemporary art since it avoids any reference to the modern notion of the aesthetic (to the aesthetic experience of the subject or the aesthetic properties of the object), which would appear unnecessarily restrictive in the contemporary context. Instead, it concentrates on the minimal requirement that a work of art must be an appropriately motivated sign, a sign that in some way points to its meaning through its sensible or material form.⁹ This brings Danto quite close to Plotinus, whose understanding of beauty is directly connected to the work's power to make meaning visible rather than being limited to its aesthetic qualities. In this light, Plotinus' claim that Pheidias intended to create a work revealing what "Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible" (v 8, 1, 41) captures brilliantly Danto's contention that the work of art must embody its meaning.

Turning now to Bruce Nauman, who first appeared in the art-scene in the 1960s, one is clearly impressed by the volume and diversity of his work ranging,

from drawings done by an obviously deft and talented hand, through freestanding objects that all but the most reactionary academic would agree to call sculpture, to neon signs, esoteric installations, aggressively matter-of-fact videos, to what is often called Body Art, to playing games with language, and pure "sound" pieces.

PLAGENS 2014: 14

9 Danto defends his essentially Hegelian conception of art in the context of contemporary art in Danto 1997.

This diversity of artistic practices and media, frequently combined in specific works, the thematic and conceptual complexity of the works and the many ways in which the relation between the artist, the work, and the audience is articulated, make it hard to place Nauman's creative output under an all-inclusive medium, style, or theme, even leading to "the realization that his oeuvre is an unmappable universe" (Battle 2009: 85).¹⁰ In this sense, a philosophical conception of art that relies on aesthetic notions, or a definite objective associated with the artist or the audience, or an art historical theory constructed around individual arts or distinct media, is clearly of limited use as a framework for understanding Nauman's artistic practice.

Instead, a broadly Plotinian approach, in which the work of art is essentially an embodied object of contemplation, resonates strongly with Nauman's conceptualism expressed through "the principle that the idea must prevail over its formal realization" (Benezra 2002a: 92). The impression generated when surveying Nauman's art is that works and projects correspond to the reflective statement or investigation of theoretical problems that he approaches "systematically, even if he often pushes their inner logic to absurdity" (van Bruggen 1988: 105). This aspect, which is clearly linked to Nauman's well-documented background interest in philosophy and especially Wittgenstein (e.g., Nauman 2003: 127, 131; Amman 1986; Pirenne 2013: 48–54), implies that the engagement of the viewer with Nauman's works is essentially cognitive, i.e., attempt to come to terms with conceptual questions and puzzles.

Certainly, for both Plotinus and Nauman, this engagement is also physical and psychological, as is proper to embodied individuals who engage with embodied meanings. For Plotinus, this may be the main shortcoming of art when compared to philosophy; and it is strongly pronounced in Nauman, whose artistic investigations have nothing "refined" or "subtle," as they are typically pursued through material or sensory configurations that, even when minimalistic, tend towards the "blatant, [the] startling, [the] confrontational" (Wallach 2002: 36). If artistic creativity is related to a demand for "filling all things with contemplation" (III 8, 7, 23), for turning everything into an object of thought, Nauman is thus an extreme Plotinian artist in his insistence that even the most resistant material (the elementary, the gross, the cheap, the apparently random, the sophomoric, the industrial, the boringly matter-of-fact) is not

10 A recent overview of Nauman's work is Plagens 2014, with further references to previous studies; Benezra 2002b provides a useful survey up to the mid-90s. Nauman 2003 is a collection of texts and interviews by Nauman himself; Morgan 2002a is a useful collection of essays, reviews and documents; Lewallen 2007 is a study of Nauman's work in the 1960s, the period on which this chapter focuses.

immune to the infusion of meaning. In this sense, “the basic working mode” of Nauman appears indeed as a combination of “a visceral conceptualism and a bluntly conceptual sense” (Plagens 2014: 72) of art.

2 Making and Knowing the Self

Plotinus’ views on art and creativity pertain also to the specific theoretical problematic of human selfhood which provides the focus for the present discussion. The starting point of Plotinus’ account is a metaphysical conception of the soul as a separate entity that in significant respects resembles the “deficient” creators indicated previously. Although, in general, the soul has access to the intelligible world of meaning (i.e., it is capable of contemplating noetic objects directly), it does not contain its own origin within itself: the soul itself is an image of a higher metaphysical principle, the Intellect. Hence, the soul is not available to itself as a secure object of a self-constitutive contemplation through which it could achieve and sustain a self-sufficient identity (see, for example, the comparison between the soul and the Intellect in IV 4, 1–4). In simpler terms, since the soul does not make itself directly, it cannot know itself immediately and vice versa. In order to address this “deficiency,” the soul has two opposing yet at the same time mutually dependent resources, one theoretical and one practical. The first is to withdraw within itself in order to recollect in contemplation its original simple identity, to know itself without making itself. The second is to project itself into a series of images, in order to make itself without fully knowing itself. The process of projection is equivalent to the constitution of the embodied human individual, the human self: the structure of the soul taken together with the series of images it generates corresponds to the full biological and psychological reality of the human individual (IV 3, 12, 1–12).

This projection is essentially creative: the soul creates or shapes its embodiment as an image of itself, and thus “externalizes” or “translates” itself into a sensible, material configuration.¹¹ In this sense, being a self becomes a special and important case of being engaged in a creative project, one that is similar to the project of the artist. This similarity is underlined in a well-known passage

11 Note that this embodiment is not merely the biological or material body of the individual; Plotinus is not thinking in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. Rather, the soul’s embodiment includes everything that pertains to the interaction of an individual with sensible reality (e.g., one’s sensations, memories, pleasures, concerns, practical activities, actions).

from the treatise "On Beauty," where Plotinus describes the project of being a self in terms of a self-creation to be accomplished in the way a sculptor works on a statue:

Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop working on your statue till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat. (I 6, 9, 7–16)

This passage can be considered as metaphorical in an ordinary, rhetorical, sense, establishing an analogy between a sculptor working on a statue and an "I" working on a self. However, the metaphor is more complex and substantial from a philosophical point of view, relying on another set of analogies with ontological significance for Plotinus: as the statue is a link established through a transfer (literally *metaphora*) between Zeus and a piece of gold and ivory, the self is a link established through a transfer between the I or soul and its sensible embodiment.¹²

The constitution of the self is a process of self-creation, and thus its various elements point back to the same entity, the soul: the soul (*qua* creator) creates an image of itself (hence becoming a work), so that it (*qua* spectator) can then contemplate itself in its work. This multiplicity is the direct result of the inability of the soul to occupy simultaneously the roles of the creator and the spectator: to know itself as it makes itself and to make itself as it knows itself without any remainder, i.e., without the need for an external work that will mediate this process. Moreover, it establishes an internal distance, extension or displacement within the soul that, in its various expressions, determines essentially the structure of the self. In this sense, being a self is, for Plotinus, a direct consequence of the inability of the soul to be fully and immediately present to itself that results in its diffraction in a spatial-temporal spectrum.

Physical space is a result of the soul's embodiment, or more appropriately for Plotinus, the body's ensoulment: "The universe extends as far as soul goes; its limit of extension is the point to which in going forth it has soul to keep it in being" (IV 3, 9, 46–48). However, the diffraction of the soul results also in the

¹² These brief remarks cannot, of course, capture the full complexity of the Plotinian embodied self. For a detailed discussion, see Remes 2007.

distinction between the external and the internal, the distance between the interiority of the soul and the exteriority of its sensible image or its other creative works. This is the distance, for example, between what I mean or intend and what I say or do, between the work as conceived and the work as executed. For Plotinus, it marks the weakening of soul's metaphysical identity through the generation of self-images characterized by increasing alterity. Time is also a result of the soul's embodiment "for we maintain that we grasp time in its essential nature as around the activity of the soul and deriving from it" (IV 4, 15, 3–5). In the life of the embodied individual, time is implicated in the distance between the creative moment of self-projection and the reflective moment of self-recognition in the projected image, as complicated by the ever present possibility of a recollection of soul's original condition. In terms of Plotinus' metaphor of the statue, this is the distance between first working on your statue, then pause in order to see if indeed you can recognise yourself in the result, i.e., recognize a vision of yourself available to you only as a recollection. From the point of view of the soul as a metaphysical entity, these conditions, to use a Kantian formulation, are merely conditions of experience: the soul, being itself outside space and time, must experience its works in space and time, side by side, or one after the other. But for the self, conceived as the link between the soul and its embodied image, these are conditions of being: the self is itself a constantly changing multiplicity, finding at any moment itself side by side with itself or before and after itself.

We could then say that the project of being a self essentially amounts to managing the tensions and risks inherent in this fragmented condition of the soul with the help of its theoretical and practical capacities. For Plotinus, as I have already suggested, the final imperative of this task seems to be theoretical. The primary aim, as defined by the Delphic oracle, is to "know yourself," since, as he puts it in a way which would certainly have delighted Nietzsche or Freud, this is the appropriate task for

those who because of their selves' multiplicity have the business of counting themselves up and learning that they do not know all of the number and kind of things they are, or do not know any of them, not what their ruling principle is or by what they are themselves. (VI 7, 41, 22–26)

The primacy of the theoretical delimits the scope of the corresponding practical imperative: one has to "make" oneself only to the extent that this contributes to the project of "knowing" oneself. However, behind this demand for self-knowledge lies a deeper quest for soul overcoming its fragmented condition, since the distinctive mark of contemplation is that it "unifies more, so

what knows, in so far as it knows (...) comes into unity with what is known" (III 8, 6, 16–17). In this sense, the primacy of the theoretical "know yourself" over the practical "make yourself" reflects both the importance that Plotinus attaches to the more fundamental "unify yourself" as the ultimate aim of the project of being a self and a certain evaluation as to how one can achieve this kind of self-identity.

Regardless of Plotinus' specific primacy of the theoretical over the practical, it is clear that being a self defines a project that is both philosophical and artistic. Thus, in one sense, to successfully engage with this project entails that each one of us has to be in turns a philosopher and an artist. In another sense, the project itself can be a common preoccupation of philosophers and artists; it can be fruitfully explored both in philosophical and artistic ways. An artistic exploration of this kind is clearly evidenced throughout Nauman's work. His preoccupation with the issue of the self is so central that it leads, for example, Robert Morgan to attribute to Nauman both a "persistence in exploring art as an investigation of the self" (Morgan 2002b: 1) and a resolve "to think about art as a phenomenon of the self" (Morgan 2002b: 14), capturing thus the *raison d'être* of art itself, or the task of the artist, in terms of the theoretical and practical interests that guide and sustain the project of being a self.

This constant reflection on the possibilities and limits of the artistic representation, expression, or communication of the self may well underlie Nauman's "eventual contribution," the transformation of "Minimalism's iconic (platonic) form into something more mutative and psychological" (Auping 2004: 8). It certainly links Nauman to the long artistic tradition of exploring this theme¹³ and it is expressed throughout his creative output in a variety of ways. Thematically, there are works concerned with one's own body or physical self, with the self considered as a social mechanism, with the confrontation between human individuality and modern mass society, or the relation between the private and the public. Nauman's engagement with selfhood is expressed through works that typically blur, or even eliminate, the traditional separation between the artist, the work, and the audience, inserting the experience of the (actual) artist or the (actual) viewer into the very core of the work. In terms of media, even in the short period between 1966–1970 to which this discussion is limited, Nauman pursues issues pertaining to selfhood through short films, videos, photographs, performances, sculptures, and installations combining these media in different ways. In respect to their theme, each of the

13 "The investigation of self by someone truly interested in exploring and then restating the self in visual terms lies fully in keeping with the traditional art values of representation and communication of self" (Goodman 2002: 29).

three works to be discussed in the following section contributes a particular angle to the problematic of selfhood; while being of different kind, in terms of media and techniques, they highlight the interconnectedness of Nauman's artistic output.

3 Works and Words

From Hand to Mouth (1967) is one of Nauman's early and best-known sculptures. The work is a wax cast on cloth of a hand, arm, and mouth, hung on the wall at a height that gives the impression that it belongs to a real human being, albeit invisible as a whole. Nauman himself described that period of his work as a time when he "was forced to examine [him]self, and what [he] was doing [in the studio]"; this self-examination included an interest in using his own body in his work, which often "took the form of acting out puns" (Nauman 2003, 118).¹⁴ Nauman's fascination with the possibility of a literal "realization" of linguistic metaphors or puns is evident in *From Hand to Mouth*. We start from the literal meaning of the title, "with barely enough money or food to satisfy immediate needs," which is then captured metaphorically in the expression "from hand to mouth," which is further transferred and literally embodied in a three-dimensional material medium. This double movement, from the linguistic to the material/visual and from the metaphorical to the literal, raises several issues. Some take the form of allusions pertaining to language: its origin and nature (the emergence of speech out of gesture, i.e., in a movement from hand to mouth; the analogy between language and tools)¹⁵ or the need of a context for the appreciation of meaning: a de-contextualized expression, "cut off" from the fabric of language, is presented aesthetically as a "mutilated appendage" (De Michelis 2009: 69).

However, the central issue thematized directly by the work is the very notion of the work of art as an object of embodied meaning. The literalization of meaning results in a work that seems to bypass the issue of understanding

14 See Wagner 2007: 55–56 for a discussion of the significance of the period for the emergence of Nauman's artistic identity. Nauman discusses further his interest in puns in Nauman 2003: 159. About his influences and objectives in such works, see Lewallen 2007: 48–49; for a broader discussion of this tendency in American art, see Bowman 1985.

15 Leroi-Gourhan's *Le Geste et la parole*, an attempt at a unified theory linking language, gesture, technology, and art in the context of human evolution was published in France in 1964. According to Storr, *From Hand to Mouth* "constitutes an aesthetic equation relating the work of hands to the workings of language, the manipulation of matter to that of words" (2002: 157).

art, by trapping the spectator in an unsatisfactory vacuous movement from one metaphor to another that misses altogether the encounter with meaning, displaying a “linguistic primitivism in which the gap between signifier and signified is imagined to be closed” (Miller 1995: 127). In one sense, by looking at *From Hand to Mouth* “what you see is what you get” (Goodman 2002: 30): the meaning of the work is as deadly obvious as any tautology; in another sense, “somewhere between an expression of poverty and a literal measurement from one part of the body to another,” “meaning is suspended” (Morgan 2002b: 5). Nauman’s strategy clearly takes “the risks inherent to all art posed as metaphysics: trivialization and self-regard” (Goodman 2002: 30). Danto’s reading of the work, for example, contends that Nauman’s transformations are “pretty silly,” showing “a certain blindness to meaning or a will to subvert it” (Danto 2002: 152). It is indeed the case that understanding “the image by finding the cliché that fits it” (152) does not help us understand what it means to live “from hand to mouth.” In this light, and in order to redeem Nauman’s work, we may take it as a forceful reminder that the intuitive concreteness and density of the artwork is always a matter of a reflective and imaginative encounter with meaning: imitation in the derogatory Platonic sense (the mere replication of something, be it a meaning or an object, in another medium, however literally or realistically) leads to rather impoverished, lifeless, or even “macabre” art.¹⁶

However, *From Hand to Mouth* does not simply offer the literal rendering of a randomly chosen metaphorical expression. This expression significantly alludes to a certain kind of human life, while also being a representation of the human body that can be taken, in the most straightforward manner, as an embodied metaphor for the human self. From this point of view, what is actually present in the work points exclusively to the “parts” of the self that establish the points of contact between the internal and the external, the points through which the self interacts causally with the world and thus becomes a part of it available in empirical experience. Along these lines, the distance between hand and mouth must be interpreted differently: if the hand is the point in which the self is externalized, in making, doing, working, transforming the material environment in active independence, then the mouth is the point in which the self internalizes, through ingestion, all the materials necessary for its sustenance in passive dependence on the environment. Thus, the work may be considered as a portrait of the Plotinian artist, for whom some felt lack or deficiency provides the motivation for making, and the project of being a self

16 Basualdo 2009: 35 notes the work’s “greenish surface, full of detail and somewhat macabre associations”; to these we may add its status as a “relic” (Morgan 2002b: 4) and the impression of hollowness it creates.

is exclusively focused on preserving the cycle between transforming the external world and receiving nourishment from it. Its title would be, then, a playful allusion “to the precarious livelihood of artists” (Storr 2002: 157; Hixson 2002: 110), their proverbial difficulty to make ends meet, or, more generally, a comment on the mundane difficulties of human existence, its pervasive fragility, or even the dangers involved in feeding ourselves with what is immediately at hand. However, since the extremely accurate cast of the arm, together with its placement, “[evoke] precisely the totality of the body that the casting process has subtracted” (Basualdo 2009: 35), the stronger suggestion of the work is that a life from hand to mouth is an amputated life.

A way to understand the absence of this palpably evoked body is to take it as a reference to the relation between the artist and the work. If we assume that Nauman’s use of his wife’s body was only a matter of convenience and the cast was meant as an impression of himself,¹⁷ then the work, which in this case is the literal externalisation of the artist’s body, a fragment of the self’s outermost manifestation, can be generally considered as the externalisation of the artist’s self. An artist can thus present herself through her art (to herself and others) only to the extent that she can turn herself into a work, create an external image of herself that can achieve, however tentatively or misleadingly, an identity of her own as something separate from herself. However, under these conditions, the creator, the “I” behind the work or, in Plotinus’ terms, the soul of the artist, has to remain invisible, while the work acts as its trace. This trace is a symbol in the original sense: a token indicating the existence of the whole of which it is but one half. However, in *From Hand to Mouth*, this unification of the external and the internal, the two halves, is not realized: what is presented is precisely the gap between the “I” (that cannot be presented) and its work (that is the presentation). Even if the work is seen as an attempt “to transform intimate subjectivity into objective demonstration” with the maximum conceptual and

17 In a 1970 interview to W. Sharp, the interviewer assumes that *From Hand to Mouth* is a wax impression of Nauman’s own body; Nauman does not correct this assumption and discusses the work in the context of a question about using his own body in his work (Nauman 2003: 118). In two interviews from 1972 and 1980 (Nauman 2003: 163; 257), Nauman reveals that the model was his wife, pointing that “[i]t’s pretty difficult to make a cast of yourself” (257). However, most critics who discuss the work, even after 1980, assume that the cast was taken from Nauman’s own body, as acknowledged by Nauman himself in his last comment on the issue: “In that case, the cast was of someone else, not of myself as has generally been assumed—but that doesn’t really matter” (Nauman 2003: 324). And later in his career, as Plagens notes, Nauman was “drawing ‘self-portraits’ in the form of reverse-side—the hollow side—views of plaster casts of what may or may not be (he’s not saying) his own face” (Plagens 2014: 28).

material austerity, to catch the artist at the moment “he acts and is acted upon” by himself (Tucker 2002: 23), the fact remains that the “I” that acts is visible in *From Hand to Mouth* only through its absence.

This absence contributes clearly to the almost classical poignancy that characterises *From Hand to Mouth*. The way the cast hangs on the wall, its fragmented status, the posture of the face slightly bent downwards, the repose of the hand freely hanging without being engaged in any activity, make the work similar to an ancient Greek funerary relief, which is also a symbol (a *sema*) for an irrevocably lost body.¹⁸ This similarity reveals a discrepancy between the temporal character of the life from hand to mouth, an active life punctuated by preoccupation, lack, effort, satisfaction, and the contemplative temporality fostered upon the spectator, whether sincerely or ironically, by the work. But it is also directly related to the absence of the body: in the same sense that the work does not define a space where the external and the internal aspects of the self are co-presented, it also does not define a time when such co-presentation is possible; thus, the work is essentially elegiac.

If indeed it is the case that for Nauman “exploring art” is “an investigation of the self” (Morgan 2002b: 1), if, in other words, *From Hand to Mouth* is not only about the artist and her body, or the artist and her work, but also about the relation between self-knowledge and self-making, we are left with the question concerning the import of the work. Is the work a forceful affirmation that the distance and the movement between hand and mouth closes upon itself leaving nothing behind, and is Plotinus wrong when he insists that “even with those who practice arts of this kind, there must be something in themselves, something which stays unmoved, according to which they will make their works with their hands” (III 8, 2, 11–14)? Is it the exploration of the hypothesis that living a life from hand to mouth is an unsatisfactory way to engage in the project of being a self since it amounts to a fragmented life allowing no possibility for self-knowledge? Is it meant in a quasi-transcendental Kantian sense, as a claim that the “I” behind the phenomenal self can never be “shown,” i.e., can never become an object of an intuitive presentation in experience or art? Clearly, there is no definitive answer to these questions, but we can continue to pursue them by accepting Nauman’s invitation to enter his *Live-Taped Video Corridor*.

18 In a 1987 interview, Nauman mentions the connection between *From Hand to Mouth* and death masks as pointing to a new meaning that the work had accrued for him 20 years after its completion, beyond its original function as “a visual pun or a picture of a visual pun” (Nauman 2003: 325).

Live-Taped Video Corridor (1970) is one of Nauman's most successful installations. It consists of a corridor, almost 10 meters long and only 50 centimetres wide, formed by two parallel white wallboards. At the far end of the corridor, there are two video monitors stacked on the floor. The top monitor plays live feed from a camera mounted at the corridor's entrance at a height of about three meters. The bottom monitor features taped footage of the empty corridor from the same angle. On entering the corridor and walking toward the monitors one views oneself on the top monitor, but, given the location of the camera, one sees oneself from behind, diminishing in size (receding) as one approaches the monitor. Moreover, the wide-angle lens of the camera changes the rate of one's movement: as one moves toward the monitor, one's image (of their back) appears to move faster. During this time, the bottom monitor shows the corridor empty.¹⁹

The critical reception of the work (e.g., Krauss 1977: 240–242; Plagens 2014: 130) has stressed the connection of *Live-Taped Video Corridor* to the notion of “theatricality” that Michael Fried attributed to Minimalist art in his seminal 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood” that identified, with a polemical intention, a number of important characteristics of Minimalism. At the core of this theatricality lies the concern “with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters” the work of art (Fried 1998: 150), a concern that aims, through the deployment of various elements in the work and its environment, to create a “stage” in which the experience of the work would be “of an object in a situation (...) that (...) includes the beholder” (Fried 1998: 150). In other words, the aim of the Minimalist artist is to create not a work containing its meaning or value in itself, but rather to create (the stage for) an experience of the interaction between the work and the spectator, whose participation becomes thus an integral part of the work, while the control of this participatory experience remains with the artist.

In *Live-Taped Video Corridor* this notion of theatricality is fully intensified. The staged interaction between the object and the viewer is transformed on both sides: the viewer becomes an active performer whose physical participation is indispensable for the actualisation of the work, while the object becomes an environmental sculpture entirely dedicated to the manipulation of

19 Nauman discusses the work in various interviews in Nauman 2003: 112–115; 262–264; 312. The 1970 *Live-Taped Video Corridor* belongs to a sequence of similar corridor installations that started with *Performance Corridor* (1969), continued with corridors involving mirrors or coloured lights, and culminated in a multi-corridor installation created in 1970 at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, of which *Live-Taped Video Corridor* was essentially a part.

the participant's experience. At the same time, the artist becomes a director, exercising strict control over the movement and the experience of the participant through the use of physical limitations or technological devices. Thus, "in the process the viewer becomes almost an object—a sculptural element—while external space itself seems to assume agency: overwhelming the spectator (...) as a controlling or disciplining factor" (Kraynak 2003: 24). From another point of view, following Nauman's remarks (Nauman 2003: 112–115), this kind of control seems necessary if the spectator is to successfully replace the artist in the role of the performer of the work: the initial corridor installation was "a construction originally conceived as a frame for a series of actions performed only for the video camera" by Nauman himself (Buskirk 2005: 246, referring to the video work *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968). Either way, there seems to be a convergence of the spectator, the work, and the artist: the meaning of the work is in the end the embodied experience of the performer during the performance.

In the context of our discussion, the spectator-performer-artist who confronts the corridor wondering whether to enter could be understood as a Plotinian "man of action": an agent with the capacity to create (complex devices like the *Live-Taped Video Corridor* in pursuit of his ends); a capacity to act (walk towards a destination); a consciousness of himself sufficient for this capacity (an awareness of one's position, motion, orientation; a notion of himself as "axiomatically coordinated" (Krauss 1977: 240); and a desire to contemplate (to see what is there to be seen at the end of the corridor). This, as the work shows, is essentially a desire for self-knowledge, a desire to see an image of one's face that cannot be satisfied directly, without the mediation of some external device. This agent resembles the child Dionysus, ready to project his self-image on the mirror made by Hephaestus, the god-artist responsible for the creation of sensible things in the Neoplatonic lore (Proclus, *In Tim.* i 142.24 Diehl), and (mis)recognise himself with pleasure in the image, in a story that, properly understood, reveals, for Plotinus, the truth about the embodiment of an individual soul, i.e., the constitution of the human self through the establishment of an affective bond between the soul and its image based on (mis)recognition (IV 3, 12, 1–12).

Indeed, if a mirror or a camera were at the end of Nauman's corridor, there would be nothing unsettling in the participant's experience. In walking toward it, her self-experience would be in complete harmony with her perception of the process through the reflective surface, while eventually, after the physical and psychological discomfort of going through the narrow corridor, she would be gratified with a self-image that could satisfy (however misleadingly) her desire to see herself, gain self-identity by being simultaneously the subject and

object of her vision. This agent however, would run the risk of sharing Narcissus' fate (v 8, 2, 31–36), drowning herself in the attempt to identify with her image. Nauman's corridor eliminates this risk, but in a way that makes the possibility of recognizing oneself even more precarious.

Even if we disregard the bottom monitor that shows an empty corridor, the evidence of the top monitor is still unsettling, since it indicates that an instance of self-identity between subject and object of knowledge is impossible in these conditions. In "spatial" terms, the subject cannot see herself "face to face" but is limited to a view of herself "from the outside," an "outside" that can range from Plotinus' material reality to Foucault's modern technological surveillance mechanisms. In "temporal" terms, the fact that the subject can see herself only from behind, that she cannot look simultaneously at the camera and the monitor, suggests that the self cannot be seen in the act of seeing: the attempt at self-knowledge thus implies an inevitable temporal lag between the subject and the object of knowledge. And, of course, what is even more unsettling is that walking toward the monitor, the only action available to the participant, makes things even worse: she sees herself receding in the image, an experience that undermines the bond of recognition on which the self depends by bringing into consciousness the doubling and displacement of the soul that, for Plotinus, is implicated in its embodiment and the establishment of the self.

Live-Taped Video Corridor questions thus the very coherence of the self. It raises the question "whether this complex mechanism of the self (...) simply exists as an on-going work-in-process, an aggregate of systemic interventions that have no clear resolution" (Morgan 2002b: 1) and reveals the internal antinomic tensions of this process. In comparison with *From Hand to Mouth*, the introduction of performative participation through the use of video enables Nauman to move from a presentation of the self in its external aspect, a static fragment of a totality that cannot be presented, to a work in which the self is indeed presented as the stage of a dynamic yet somehow incoherent process. This is progress in terms of art's power to investigate the project of being a self, but renders the project itself even more problematic. Bearing this in mind, we proceed to the third and final work.

Lighted Performance Box is a sculpture installation consisting of a vertical rectangular aluminium box measuring 198.1×55.9×50.8 cm and a 1000-watt halogen theatrical lamp contained within it. Although the lamp itself is not visible, its strong light casts a bright reflection on the ceiling above, revealing that the box is hollow and open at the top.

A starting point for interpreting the work is to explore its connection with Minimalism. Initially this connection becomes evident in the stark sculptural

shape of the rectangular column that appears as a prototypical Minimalist object, a clear example of “the use of strong gestalt or of unitary type forms to avoid divisiveness” (Robert Morris quoted in Fried 1998: 150). It is also clear with respect to another important effect of the “special complicity that [the Minimalist] work extorts from the beholder” (Fried 1998: 155) in their staged encounter, namely, the transformation of the object into something “like a surrogate person—that is, a kind of statue” (Fried 1998: 155). This impression is typically associated with “the apparent hollowness (...) the quality of having an inside” of many Minimalist works, which leads to a strong anthropomorphism “as though the work in question has an inner, even secret, life” (Fried 1998: 156).

As noted (Cross 2003: 13; Lewallen 2007: 89), this kind of anthropomorphism emerges in *Lighted Performance Box* as the cumulative effect of its hollowness, scale, and placement. In this connection, the reconsideration of Pheidias’ artistic mandate to deliver “what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible” (v 8, 1, 32–41) proves quite suggestive. If Zeus were to be embodied as a physical object, he would have, in abstract terms, to acquire a material “exterior,” which, being material and thus opaque, would run counter to his transparency as an intelligible object. At the same time, the artist should shape this exterior in a way that its intelligible origin could be traced while motivating its contemplative recovery. In sum, Zeus’ statue, like *Lighted Performance Box*, would be an opaque material form capable of guiding our (inner) eyes upwards or inwards towards the (noetic) light that illuminates it. Moreover, given Plotinus’ own “anthropomorphic,” or rather “animistic” assumptions about art, that is, his claim that any work of art, regardless of its specific content, is, as a work of the soul, a “lifelikeness” (VI 7, 22, 30–32) of its creator in which the soul “sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality” (I 6, 2, 9–10), this “generic” work of art can be equally well considered as a statue of the artist, the spectator, or the human being.

Nauman’s regress to the most obvious “Platonic” configuration of the human being in *Lighted Performance Box* (the material container of the body outside; the immaterial light of the soul inside) enables him to overcome the fragmentation evident in *From Hand to Mouth*. Moreover, the way he develops this configuration de-stabilizes the rigid distinctions that structure it (inside/outside, light/darkness) in the direction of a greater unification. The light, with its source hidden inside the container but pouring through the open top, renders visible the exterior of the container, that is, the very thing that makes it invisible, revealing in this way also its own presence. Thus the light, contained, as it were, initially within the box, in the end contains the box; in the transition between these two moments, the container is no longer an opaque solid object but has become a rather transparent boundary. Viewed this way, the problem

of the representation of the self is radically transformed from a move from the external to the internal, the visible to the invisible, to an act of turning the container inside out: all along, the external is visible because of its invisible internal and vice versa, an idea particularly pronounced also in Plotinus (IV 3, 9, 36–43; V 5, 9, 29–31).

However, *Lighted Performance Box*, as a minimalist work, in full compliance with Fried's conception of minimalism, is also "theatrical." Its theatricality is clearly suggested by the word "performance" in its title: in a typical display of Nauman's strict "conceptual restraint" in its "economy of mediums" (Battle 2009: 85), the work, although still a sculptural object, is not merely set on stage, but is itself the stage for a performance. Understanding the nature of this performance becomes thus a necessary component for the full appreciation of the work.

The performance may refer to the reaction that the work "extorts" from the viewer. After the first impression, that of an opaque solid box, the shape of the box, "whose 'gestalt' is supposedly delivered at a glance as an imperative to look upward" (Leider 1970: 70), directs our gaze to the illuminated space above the box. As the reflection of light captures our attention, we realise that the box is nothing but a hollow container for the light. The overall result is that we view the work by moving our head or eyes "up and down, like a yo-yo" (Leider 1970: 70) between the physical object and the illuminated reflection, perhaps in a repeatedly frustrated attempt to trace the projected light back to its invisible source. That we become aware of the contents of the box by looking at the light's projection on the ceiling and not by looking directly inside the box "suggests that the real focus lies outside the artwork itself" (Cross 2003: 13), at a place, however, which the work reveals with its presence. Complicating things a little, the clear phenomenal focus provided by the reflected light, as strongly as it directs our attention outside the work, equally strongly suggests the existence of the source of light as the real focus within the invisible interior of the work.

The reaction described in the previous paragraph, suggests clearly that *Lighted Performance Box* is not a work that can be "taken in" in a single instance, a work "wholly manifest (...) at every moment" (Fried 1998: 167). Rather, our experience of it can be described in temporal terms as "a presentment of endless and indefinite duration" (ibid. 166), "a sense of time both passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective" (ibid. 167). From this point of view, Nauman's ability to overcome the fragmentation of *From Hand to Mouth* rests on the deployment of the temporality that for Plotinus characterises the existence of embodied souls, since their embodiment implies that they "have somewhere they come

from (...) and somewhere to go to, and a going down and going about: consequently also a going up" (III 9, 3, 5–6), and hence time is for them an indefinite duration of moving in two opposite directions.

However, there are more possibilities worth pursuing concerning the "performance" implied by the title of the work. Taking a lead from an earlier similar sculpture, *Lighted Center Piece* (1967), which consists of an aluminium square illuminated from four sides by halogen lamps so that "[a]ll attention is focused on the blank surface as if on an empty stage," and "the human presence is suggested by its absence," the point of the work seems to be that "the spectator is left to conjure up the actor" (Lewallen 2007: 89), or, in other words, that "the work provokes the viewer to mentally project the image of the artist or even of his or her own body into the space" (Cross 2003: 13). In response to this "provocation" (which could be compared to Plotinus' claim that the work of art, by being attractive to soul, is capable of issuing an invitation to it and receive a share of it; IV 3, 11, 1–8), the viewer establishes an anthropomorphic link, seeing the box as a statue, of the artist or herself, or attempts to occupy the performing stage through projection, "to climb into the box and stand under the bright light" (van Bruggen 1988: 238). In both cases, "the performer-spectator is made aware of the physical limitations the artist has imposed" (ibid.) through the opacity of the box. Viewed as a statue, the box offers no expressive inducements to anthropomorphic identification, no specific intimation of its "inner, even secret, life" (Fried 1998: 155); viewed as a theatre, the box does not have any physical point of entrance or any window that could allow the spectator at least some glimpse of the stage. The existence of these physical limitations suggests that the performance of *Lighted Performance Box* is not a physical action, but rather a mental exercise, similar to the ones we find scattered throughout Plotinus' works (e.g., VI 4, 7, 19–40, which contains an example that seems quite relevant to the experience of the spectator "climbing into" Nauman's box).

Crossing the distance from hand to mouth, entering the corridor, or turning the box inside out, involves different kinds of physical or mental activity and implies different relations between the artist, the work, and the spectator. However, they all seem to suggest very similar metaphoric exercises. What do these exercises, prompted and guided by visual or verbal metaphors, tell us about the project of being a self, of acquiring a self-identity? Carl Hausman suggests that a world "which includes the outcomes of metaphors must be understood as a totality of identities" (Hausman 1989: 191). For Hausman, these identities refer not only to "whatever is" but also to what "could be."²⁰ In the context of selfhood, this suggests that gaining a self-identity is not a

20 For a related discussion of Hausman's position see, Vassilopoulou & Ganeri 2005: 9.

task that can be accomplished by uncovering an internal “I,” or by recording thoughts, experiences and actions, or by constructing fully coherent and unified narratives. The self, as Plotinus suggests, is a multiplicity of metaphoric links that the soul, *qua* creator and spectator of its own image, establishes with itself through the mediation of its creations. These links are invariably fragmented, displaced, or opaque. However, like any “live” metaphor, the self, if it is to remain alive, cannot be defined or resolved through literalization; hence, it remains open-ended, always a work-in-progress. And it is in respect of the intricacies and implications of this idea that Plotinus offers a way to interpret Nauman’s works and Nauman’s art illuminates aspects articulated theoretically by Plotinus.²¹

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21 An earlier version of this chapter was delivered as a lecture during my 2-year Philosophy Residency at the Bluecoat Arts Centre (2013–15). It formed the source of inspiration for *Mythos*, a performance piece by vocal artist Steve Boyland. The piece premiered in Liverpool in 2014 and has since been performed in many venues around Europe. In turn, Steve’s creative output and discussions I had with other members of the public have greatly informed the development of this chapter. I would like to thank the Bluecoat and its public for their generous support of my research.

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Avoiding the “Dead Thing Decorated.” Neoplatonism and *Daniel Martin*: Towards a Poetics of Film?

Michelle Phillips Buchberger

There are several parallels between key elements of Plotinus’ philosophy and those ideas central to the fiction of British author John Fowles. Since the latter’s work has been frequently adapted for the screen, and subsequently discussed at length by the author in his startlingly candid journals, his work is particularly germane to a consideration of whether Neoplatonic philosophy might be used as a basis for a theory applicable for film studies. Specifically, his highly autobiographical novel, *Daniel Martin*, epitomizes a central theme of the British writer’s work in its consideration of the ability of film to capture the evanescent nature of the lived experience, and the interest of the titular protagonist, a novelist-cum-screenwriter, in a contemplative vehicle for its authentic apprehension. Also interesting and germane to this study is the complex relationship Fowles had with the cinema; his early enthrallment with the medium gradually becoming soured by his angst-ridden experience in the adaptation of three of his novels, which would give rise to some acerbic attacks on various directors and a general mistrust of the Hollywood “machine.” Nevertheless, he retained great hopes for the moving image, believing that it would ultimately be an aid rather than an impediment to his artistic project. I suggest in the pages that follow that the trajectory charted in Fowles’ work anticipates many of the interests and aims of the “slow movies” movement, which has emerged as a counter to the action-packed Hollywood blockbuster of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite Fowles’ increasing ambivalence toward cinema, his works constantly reflect a need for an artistic medium that transcends the material world; one that stimulates contemplation in the reader rather than merely providing entertaining escapism. I posit that Fowles’ work, both his fiction and the subsequent film adaptations, provides a valuable benchmark in the consideration of contemplative cinema and its Neoplatonic influences (to which I will draw a strong parallel), especially given Fowles’ own highly philosophical and self-reflective approach to his work, evidenced in the publication his own philosophical *pensées*, *The Aristos*, in the same year as his first novel.

In this examination, I will begin with a definition and unpacking of Plotinus’ treatises from *The Enneads*. The explanation of the different Plotinian spheres of existence will provide a framework for examining the ways in which the artist might also traverse these planes of existence when attempting to apprehend and articulate the lived experience. I will then compare this philosophical framework to the artistic project of Fowles, specifically to his 1977 novel *Daniel Martin*, tracing a parallel between the philosophical depiction of spheres of existence in Plotinus and Fowles’ pursuit of authenticity of account, ultimately suggesting a culmination in the latter’s project that is indicative of a move towards what has lately been termed “contemplative” cinema. I will discuss the key elements of “contemplative” or “slow” cinema, providing examples of artists who have also attempted to provide a more authentic and complete apprehension of the lived experience by using methods that promote a more contemplative, slow approach to the medium of film. I hope to show that the “whole sight” to which Fowles strove in *Daniel Martin* might be compared to a transcendence of the material world and the apprehension of the Intellect (or *Nous*) in Plotinus.

1 Plotinus and the Break from Platonism

Plotinus followed and supported Plato’s theories but in his own original way, including elements from pre-Platonists, Aristotle and contemporary thinkers related to Neo-Pythagoreanism and Middle-Platonism. Plato had posited the existence of a visible world that was a shallow, poor reflection of a superior immaterial. According to Peter Adamson,¹ Plotinus advocated instead a division not between the material world and a superior higher, immaterial world, but between four distinct domains: the One (or the Good), the Intellect, the Soul, and finally, the Body and the material world. In *The Enneads*, edited by Plotinus’ student, Porphyry, in 270 C.E, Plotinus details not only the relationship between these realms, but also crucially, because it offered a departure from Platonic thinking, the way each is constituted by the other. The continuum that emerges from this metaphysical treatise is that man (the Body which resides in and is made up of the material) and his perception of reality is at one end of the spectrum of existence, separated by an abyss from a complete and ineffable One. In between these realms, the Intellect and the Soul are the only knowable aspects of existence towards which the human mind must aspire

¹ This paper draws heavily on Adamson’s interpretation of *The Enneads*, and I would like to acknowledge my debt to his clear and engaging explanation of the work.

to achieve some kind of connection or higher knowledge, or risk residing in a bleak world of the material. These realms of being are reproduced from the One, and more importantly, there is potential for the human mind to reconnect with higher planes of existence, transcending the material by a process of profound contemplation. To achieve this connection, the individual must escape the innumerable distractions of the material world in order to apprehend a more holistic and authentic view of existence. This is, I suggest, ultimately the artistic project of Fowles and of those film makers associated with the contemplative film movement. In Fowlesian parlance, it is “whole sight; or all the rest is desolation” (Fowles 1977: 7), which are the words that both open and implicitly close the novel that will be the focus of my study.

According to Plotinus, the One is the notion of complete simplicity (*Ennead* VI 9). In Plotinian philosophy, this notion of complete simplicity is also one of unity; an absence of multiplicity. With increasing multiplicity comes an inversely proportionate degree of unity, which is the source of decay, disease, and ugliness in the material world. Plotinus pointed to the One, the ultimate simple, as the source of all unity, with the One giving unity to the Intellect, which in turn provided the unity for the Soul and then to the material world. Plotinus’ concept of the One diverges from the prevailing Platonic concept of the ultimate creator, as articulated in the dialogue *Parmenides*, as devoid of potential multiplicity or potentiality. Plotinus saw his concept of the One as a response to the main critique of Platonism. Namely, if the One is the creator of the Intellect, it must have the capacity to conceive of that other than itself and therefore be both itself and the potential for other. By avoiding the idea of the One *actively* creating the Intellect and all other realms, Plotinus “develops” or “interprets” Plato’s thought. Plotinus’ conception and explanation of how the One can be both the ultimate simple and the potential for the Intellect provides the key to the relationship between all the posited domains, differentiating him from contemporary thinkers and establishing what would later come to be known as Neoplatonist philosophy.

Plotinus’ One is unlike anything else which it brings into being, and it transcends being and eludes the reach of thought or speech. As Plotinus explains:

Since the nature of the One produces all things It is none of them. It is not a thing or quality or quantity or intellect or soul; It is not in motion or at rest, in place or in time, but exists in Itself, a unique Form; or rather It is formless, existing before all form, before motion, before rest; for these belong to being and make it multiple.

Ennead VI 9, 3, 55

It is the method by which the One gives rise to the Intellect, and so on down the chain of being that is so revolutionary. It not only explains how an indivisible ineffable entity might also give rise to multiplicity without itself having this quality, but also it provides a linkage between the spheres of existence, and more importantly when considering this philosophy's application to film theory, intimates that these spheres might be traversed.

The processes Plotinus posited by which the different hypostases of being are derived from the One are twofold: first, internal and external activity and secondly, progression and recession. Internal activity is that potential creative power which arises from qualities with which that element is imbued. Plotinus compares this quality to the internal and external activity demonstrated by a fire naturally radiating heat or by the sun giving off light, merely as a side effect of its existence. In both cases, something is created, quite passively and seemingly without intention or effect on the originating source, as a result of its (the sun's or fire's) perfect existence:

How did it come to be then? And what are we to think of as surrounding the One in Its repose? It must be a radiation from It while It remains unchanged, just like the bright light which surrounds the sun, which remains unchanged though the light springs from it continually. (v 1, 6, 66)

And:

Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can. So fire warms, snow cools, drugs act on other things; everything seems to imitate the Principle as far as it is able by tending to everlastingness and generosity. (v 4, 1, 63–64)

The internal essence of the fire is its heat, but externally it also projects its hotness onto its surroundings. Thus the One internally is ineffable, but it projects this quality externally and in so doing spontaneously produces activity that results in the creation of the next sphere, that of the Intellect. Thus, the One is devoid of multiplicity itself but is still able to produce something other than its own entity.

The One, just as fire produces heat, produces The Intellect or "Nous"; the highest sphere of existence that a human being has the capacity to apprehend.

It is the domain that might only be known as a result of extended philosophical contemplation. Intellect is created from the One but also, in the same manner as the One gives rise to Intellect, Intellect in turn gives forth the Soul (*Ennead* v 1). The sphere of the Intellect is internally preoccupied with its discursive thinking about the perfect Forms, but externally its thinking “overflows” into the Soul, imbuing it with an external projection of this thinking. This is not an intentional act by the Intellect; it is an automatic result or overflowing of its internal function. The important ramification of this cascading flow of creation is that with each level, there is a weakened connection to and distancing from the One, a dilution, making a reconnection with or even an apprehension of the higher levels by the lower increasingly difficult to attain. This distancing and dilution is explained further by Plotinus in the second of these two sets of processes: procession and reversion (see Adamson 2015: 221).

The internal and external activity described above is accompanied by a process of procession and reversion; a kind of turning back and falling away with which Plotinus explains the diluting effect that this progressive creative process causes, and the inevitable distancing that is placed between either ends of the continuum of existence. Here, he describes how the Intellect (*Nous*) gives rise to the Soul (*Psyche*), which in turn creates the material world of animated and perceptible beings. Unlike the One and the *Nous*, however, the Soul is changed when it creates the realm of the material, indicating an increased multiplicity, and consequently, a decreased unity:

Resembling the One thus, *Nous* produces in the same way, pouring forth a multiple power. Just as That, Which was before it, poured forth its likeness, so what *Nous* produces is a likeness of itself. This activity springing from being is Soul, which comes into being while *Nous* abides unchanged: for *Nous* too comes into being while That which is before it abides unchanged. But Soul does not abide unchanged when it produces: it is moved and so brings forth an image. It looks to its source and is filled, and going forth to another opposed movement generates its own image, which is Sensation and the Principle of growth in plants. (v 2, 1, 51–52)

With each progressive step and falling away, as the originating phase attempts to impart unity on the next phase, there is an increased level of plurality; an increase in the multiplicities and opportunities for change; and an increased distance from the Good and pure knowledge. Material reality and nature are thus at the far end of the spectrum in the process of derivation from the One and are therefore the most removed from the source of simplicity, the Good and ultimate knowledge. It is the realm most removed from perfection and

the "Real"; the essence of being and form in the higher realm of *Nous*. The material is also the realm associated with human perception and the sensory apprehension of reality, which is also in consequence particularly limited in terms of its ability to apprehend the Real, such is its distance from the Real in its complete and undiluted state. Those who reside in the material world are also surrounded by the innumerable distractions by sensory perception, which also impede attempts to contemplate *Nous*.

Plotinus suggests that the Soul is an everlasting and restless intelligible motion and we as human beings have a buried memory of the Soul, but, enslaved by our dependence on a material body, we are bombarded with sensory experiences that prevent us from focusing on what the Soul would have us prioritize (*Ennead* 111 7). Although it is not impossible for us to commune with the Intellect, to do so, we must think upward; towards our true selves, freed from the distractions of the body and the material world; surely a form of contemplation.

Helpfully, Plotinus gives us direction regarding how this level of contemplation might be achieved, describing a state of being from which all distractions are removed. He writes: "It must see That Light by which it is enlightened; for we do not see the sun by another light than his own. How then can this happen? Take away everything!" (v 3, 17, 142). This imperative to "take away everything" is accompanied by autobiographical recollections of his own successful reunion with the Intellect after extensive periods of sustained contemplation, providing us with optimistic encouragement that such a reconnection is possible. This reconnection leaves in its wake a sense of bewilderment, yet also awe at the surrounding beauty and a return to a state of reasoning:

Often I have woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived to the full the best life and come to identity with the Divine. Set firm in It I have come to That Supreme Actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of *Nous*. Then, after that rest in the Divine, when I have come down from *Nous* to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body, when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body. (1v 8, 1, 121)

Ultimately, therefore, Plotinus urges the contemplation of true being, escaping the realm of the "decorated corpse" with its infectious flux that imbues the material world with ephemerality and imperfection. From this new vantage point of the Intellect, outside of the individual Soul and Body, might be glimpsed a

transcendent and universal realm. It is this “realm” that many artists have also attempted to apprehend in their work.

2 John Fowles

Plotinus’ description of an elevated level of contemplation is not unlike the kind of mystical contemplation described in Fowles’ journal. Fowles alludes to his attempts to traverse different worlds of perception, which is not unlike the movement between spheres of existence described by Plotinus. Fowles provides an account of this level of contemplation, which occurred following an illness accompanied by a profound depression that had caused him to withdraw from company and all other distractions:

In the end I became frozen and went to bed. I felt profoundly that I was a link between two worlds. That I, standing on my balcony and listening to the widgeon whistling, belonged to a wilder, more mysterious world than anyone else in this whole city. And I felt sad and frustrated that it was immeasurable, that I could never transmute the intensity and the magic of such an experience.

FOWLES 2003: 67

Fowles then, intimates that his fiction might be informed by such glimpses into other worlds; and that such glimpses were difficult, yet not impossible to attain. The world apprehended was more “mysterious” and magical, offering an intensity of experience not present in the world of the material.

Plotinus’ chain of emanation from the One to matter derived from the Soul presents us with the terminus of this continuum; human experience. *The Enneads* also present us with different ways of apprehending the human experience of time, which will also be significant in Fowles’ fiction. Whereas the Intellect is able to apprehend all at once, the Soul, situated on a horizon between the Intellect and the material world of the Body, must apprehend all possible objects of knowledge temporally, in order, and sequentially in time. Therefore, the ensouled body is temporal, and subject to change, multiplicity and disorder. And as discussed above, wherever there is change, multiplicity, and disorder, there is distance from unity and the potential to connect with Intellect and apprehend the “Real.” This multiplicity also contributes to the inability of sentient beings to apprehend the Real. The Soul attempts to impose some kind of unity on the time-bound and decaying material world, but matter is necessarily incapable of receiving the perfection of the Forms because it

is time-bound. So the images of the matter that surround us as sentient beings are, as Plotinus describes, like the reflection in a mirror, a "decorated corpse" (II 4, 5, 111). Significantly, the image of the mirror will be a prevalent one in Fowles' novel, used to depict the material, superficial state of existence in which the protagonist is trapped before he attempts to exceed this domain of material existence. When we attempt to describe what is around us, we are, in Plotinus' words, like "prisoners who have been bound in chains of gold" (I 8, 15, 112); the superficial beauty of the chains disguising the state of our imprisoned existence but also reminding us of the potential beauty of a knowledge beyond the material chains. We are trapped in this state, not perceiving Platonic flickerings on the walls of a cave, but instead something far more disturbing: we perceive only the surface of the decorated corpses that surround us. Artists who would hope to offer us a glimpse of something in excess of this level of human existence must, therefore, strive to commune with a higher level: the Intellect.

John Fowles' fiction is suggestive of an artistic project that, like Plotinus' philosophy, invokes a demand to engage not with the material world but with the more transcendent world of the intellect as a method of apprehending the Real. This preoccupation permeates Fowles' fiction. It is immediately evident in his first published novel, *The Collector* (1964) in which the male protagonist, Clegg, personifies one who has complete faith in science, logic, and sensory empiricism to the exclusion of all other modes of perception and understanding. Clegg's knowledge of butterflies is extensive but static; quite literally, since it leads to the death and pinning of the objects of his knowledge. His restricted knowledge of the world is also exemplified in his gravitation towards photography, the mimetically verisimilar, and his violent rejection of non-representational art. He is anchored to the material world, with no interest in or awareness of anything but the decorated corpses that surround him.

By the time *Daniel Martin* (1977) was published, Fowles had continually re-engaged with the challenges inherent in attempts to transcend the material in his art, and in this novel, he considers several media as options in promoting a level of contemplation that facilitates a connection with a more transcendent reality, or, in Plotinian terms, an awareness of the Nous.

Fowles' artistic project might be characterized as a striving towards a more authentic and comprehensive articulation of the lived experience, represented in his novels by the journey of an inauthentic and shallow (male) protagonist towards a greater understanding of the human existence after interaction with a (female) magus figure, who acts as a catalyst in this metamorphosis. Additionally, Fowles engages with the literary and theoretical concepts of realism as a strategy of textual reflexivity, driven less by a formal self-obsession

than by a compulsion to synthesize and explore a radical aesthetic method of articulating the parameters of reality in a manner that more adequately reflects the complexity and plurality of lived experiences of contemporary Britain in the aftermath of two world wars and in an age marked by the emergence of a late capitalist culture.

For Fowles, capturing and relating experience in a manner that is understandable, coherent and open to the interpretation of the reader is the ultimate prize. Fowles does not want to pin one meaning to an event; to convey such a meaning in relation to a singular occurrence removes its mystery and its potential myriad interpretations by the reader. Fowles' novels, therefore, when considered as an artistic project, might be read as a movement toward an art form that demands of the reader or viewer greater levels of participation rather than passive consumption; the contemplation of a stimulus that encourages a movement beyond that which is being depicted and a movement toward a more transcendent apprehension of the human experience; an attempt to apprehend what lies beyond its empirical boundaries.

3 *Daniel Martin* and the Impulse Toward Contemplation

Daniel Martin is the longest and most complex of Fowles' novels. The problematic nature of realism and the challenges inherent in adhering to realist conventions are explored by Fowles through the titular protagonist reflexively in the novel itself. The length of this novel (668 pages)² suggests an attempt to evoke the scope and reach of a historically accurate depiction of the first part of the protagonist's life. It is an encyclopaedic attempt—panoramic in its setting, containing chapters set in England, America, and parts of the Middle East (Egypt and Syria), spanning a period of around twenty years.

There are four major stages in this novel that illustrate the parallels implicit between Fowles' work and the Plotinian urge to move away from the distractions of the material and to reengage with the Intellect as a path towards apprehending a more complete concept of existence, or as Daniel Martin describes it, "whole sight."

The four stages trace the putative author's adoption and rejection of major art forms to (1) the theatre and composing scripts; (2) Hollywood; writing screenplays; (3) The journey to Palmyra and the seeming rejection of cinema; and (4) embracing the novel as the best vehicle for apprehending reality, followed by a coda that suggests that there is a place in this new vehicle for the

2 The "Triad Grafton Books" edition of this novel, published in 1986, is 668 pages long.

image, since the final page of the novel is dedicated to the contemplation of a painting by Rembrandt. There is a parallel development in the protagonist during these four phases; a stripping away of inauthenticity, culminating in a brief moment of contemplatory revelation that occurs in the final pages of the novel.

This summary might suggest that rather than the cinema, the novel is Fowles' medium of choice to encourage contemplation in his readers. However, I posit that Fowles' apparent rejection of the cinema is not in fact a disavowal of the moving image *per se*, but instead a rejection of commercialized entertainment that panders to the audience's desire for escapism. The fact that the novel appears to be privileged in *Daniel Martin* is somewhat undercut by the placement of the Rembrandt episode in the novel's concluding pages, reestablishing the importance of the image. The image, it seems, is a crucial aspect of the "whole sight" to which Martin aspires.

At the beginning of the novel the protagonist, Daniel Martin, embittered by divorce, alienated from family, and living an inauthentic life, first seeks the medium of the theatre screenplay to explore and represent the human realm. However, this medium is firmly situated in the material world. By his own admission, his play "The Victors" is written solely to fix a distorted view of the failure of his marriage, and it attacks two of his long-time friends, Jane and Anthony Mallory, unfairly attributing much of the blame for his divorce on them. The public performance of his play results in the end of their friendship. The work is anchored completely in material reality, which, Martin reflects later, is too much for the human soul to apprehend. "The Victors," Martin reflects, "killed one other thing besides a friendship. I did write two more plays, but my heart was in neither of them. It is not only human kind that cannot bear too much reality" (Fowles 1977: 180).

4 Looking at Reality

Throughout their friendship, Anthony Mallory, has drawn attention to Martin's obsession with "looking at" rather than "looking for," which is suggestive of Martin's early preoccupation with the material. Martin, Mallory remarks when reflecting on their shared interest in rare flora, is interested in looking "at orchids, not for them" (Fowles, 1977: 194). Martin is also unusually preoccupied with his own reflection, possessing so many mirrors in his college room, that he earns the nickname "Mr. Specula Speculans" (Fowles 1977: 58). These tendencies are suggestive of a myopia; a focus on the immediately present, the material, and an engagement with reality that is wholly empirical. Like previous

flawed male characters, he wishes to apprehend and fix the essentially elusive and transient in a material present, and these attempts result in reduction or even distortion, as in the unfair accusations leveled in "The Victors."

As the novel progresses, the protagonist experiments with different modes of artistic expression, including the Hollywood screenplay. Leaving his play writing career and Oxford behind him, he embarks on a highly lucrative but ultimately unfulfilling career in Hollywood. Here too, he is situated in the material; a world that apprehends only the golden chains of reality's surface. Hollywood, for Martin, personifies this mode of artistic realism. It is a place of "constant flowing through oneness [...] chained to the present image" (Fowles 1977: 353), which would imply an obsession with and unquestioning knowledge of the materiality of the time-bound image, impeding any potential transcendence. In Hollywood, Martin's entrapment in an eternal "oneness" is also characterized by his relationship with actress Jenny McNeill, who is only three years older than his own daughter, suggesting a resistance to any maturation of thought or being. This relationship ails as he grows increasingly aware of a nausea associated with his professional and personal existence. He feels unfulfilled by screenwriting in Hollywood. It is a medium that in Martin's mind, ultimately lacks the ability to transcend the present and articulate the real. He muses:

I suppose it was about reality. Failures to capture it. Those stages, the flats still standing there. Movies no one even remembers any more. How all the king's plays and all the king's scripts ... and nothing in your present can ever put you together again.

FOWLES 1977: 19

Martin reflects that the failure of this medium to grant him any kind of artistic satisfaction, to reveal anything about the human existence, lies in its being time bound—focusing on the "now" with no ability to transcend the materiality of human existence. As Martin reflects before rejecting Hollywood for good: "Film excludes all but now; permits no glances away to past and future; is therefore the safest dream. That is why I had given so much of my time and ingenuity to it" (Fowles 1977: 168).

Fowles' reflection on the "oneness" of Hollywood film making demonstrates a parallel with Plotinus' critique of the time-bound nature of the material world and its inevitable boundaries that prevent an apprehension of anything other than the gold chains that bind us, compared to the eternality of the *Nous*. In *Ennead* III 7, Plotinus distinguishes Time as the restless life of the Soul, with Eternity as the stable and eternal life of Intellect. Fowles' protagonist is thus

driven to find a medium that allows "glances away to past and future," which ultimately leads him to reject Hollywood and reconsider the novel form.

His epiphany drives Martin to take a journey, putatively researching a project on General Kitchener, and culminating in a visit to Palmyra. This journey reawakens in Martin a sense of historicity, and of the relationship between time and place. Some locations evoke a sense of timelessness, a heightened sense of awareness, where "one's past seems in some mysterious way to meet one's future" and where "one was somehow always to be there as well as being there in reality" (Fowles 1977: 346). In other words, Martin experiences a kind of dissonance in his perception that is suggestive of a greater awareness; a potentiality of what lies beyond the immediately and materially evident.

I suggest this is indicative of a movement towards a more contemplative apprehension of the lived experience that is able, in Martin's words, to transcend the "cramped, linear, and progressive" and instead allow a more "dense, interweaving, treating time as horizontal, like a skyline" (Fowles 1977: 353). In a barely disguised attack on the kind of literary fiction contemporaneous with his novel's publication, Fowles, through his protagonist, rejects the kind of novel that panders to the needs of a readership or critics. Martin declares that he will pursue a reality that lies beyond the surface: "To hell with cultural fashion; to hell with elitist guilt; to hell with existential nausea; and above all, to hell with the imagined that does not say, not only in, but behind the images, the real" (Fowles 1977: 346). Martin seems to criticize any artistic attempt to apprehend reality when it is not able to escape or exceed the confines of the material realm, just as Plotinus urges us to escape the confines of the decorated corpse.

The culmination of Martin's journey is Syria, and specifically Palmyra, a desolate "wasteland" described by Jane Mallory, Martin's travel companion, as making her feel that she has reached "the end of the world" (Fowles 1977: 622). The wasteland thereby represents a physical and psychological location where the couple are finally able to peel away the artificiality that has up until this point prevented their successful reunion and rejuvenation. They have, in Plotinian terms, "taken away everything" as a prerequisite to achieving communion with the *Nous*. This *henosis* or unity with the One, demands of those who would attempt this level of contemplation that they remove all the distractions that anchor them to the material and prevent them from transcending their limited sphere of existence (VI 9, 11). It is at this point that Martin recognizes the culmination of his artistic quest: the creation of the novel, *Daniel Martin*. However, this will be a novel that challenges many of the conventions that anchor this medium in the realms of surface realism not to mention presenting a challenge to its commercial viability.

Much of the novel examines the degree to which a novel written within the conventions of traditional realism must have established parameters of time and place. *Daniel Martin* ultimately challenges this view. For example, the genre conventions associated with autobiographical writing and the Bildungsroman are complicated by frequent cinematic techniques such as flashback, flash-forward, freeze-frames, and the insertion of chapters putatively by authors other than Martin. Abrupt tense changes, sometimes within the same chapter, dislocate any suggestion of traditional realistic narrative, drawing the reader's attention to the shifting perspective of the author as he creates a mosaic series of impressions from different perspectives in time and place. Such dislocations from reality as we come to expect in reflections of human experience force us to reflect on the stimulus, consider what is in the interstices of what is being articulated: between the domains of what is represented on the page and in the mind and experiences of the perceiver. These fractures stop the perceiver from losing herself in the narrative by resituating her in space and time, and forcing a different relationship with the narrative being encountered. Fowles' work, jolting the reader out of the fictional world and back into the human realm, provides a potential opening into the interstices—between the two realms—for apprehension and contemplation. These qualities cohere with those of contemplative cinema, a subject to which I will return below.

But it remains that there is a step missing if we are to reconcile this parallel with Plotinus' call to transcend the material and the emergence of contemplative cinema with Fowles' work. This missing step is seemingly apparent when, early in the novel, Martin seems to reject film altogether as a medium that could possibly apprehend the Real. The implicit shortcoming of film is the specificity of the image, removing too much of the connotation that is present in language. Fowles, through his protagonist, seems to privilege the written word as the best vehicle for articulating the human experience. As he reflects:

Images are inherently fascistic because they overstamp the truth, however dimmed and blurred, of the real past experience; as if, faced with ruins, we must turn architects not archaeologists. The word is the most imprecise of signs. Only a science obsessed age could fail to comprehend that this is its great virtue, not its defect. What I was trying to tell Jenny in Hollywood was that I would murder my past if I tried to evoke it on camera; and it is precisely because I can't really evoke it in words, can only hope to awaken some analogous experience in other memories and sensitivities, that it must be written.

And Martin also aspires towards a medium that exceeds the ability of the human eye and brain to apprehend and contain. He longs to create

a kind of equivalency of memories and feelings, a totality of consciousness that fragmented modern man has completely lost [...] so infinitely beyond camera and dialogue and dramatic art, as unreachable as all the landscapes beyond the limits of my eye.

FOWLES 1977: 353–354

How then might this apparent rejection of the moving image be reconciled with a Plotinian aspiration towards contemplation, which can only be achieved by freeing oneself from the distractions of the material, and the contemplative movie movement? I suggest the “totality of consciousness” or a “whole sight” to which Fowles refers in the opening and closing of the novel is the same goal to which proponents of contemplative cinema also aspire, despite these statements seeming to allude to a rejection of cinema. Far from rejecting the potential of cinema to provide a vehicle for “whole sight,” I suggest that Fowles was really just turning his back on the materialism of Hollywood and the stress of big budget productions that had made work on the adaptation of three of his novels so tortuous. Evidence for such a statement is easy to find in Fowles’ journals. Fowles’ biting criticism of Guy Green’s direction of the adaptation of *The Magus* is paradigmatic of the author’s attitude. His candid reflections captured after the film was released epitomize his antipathy toward this kind of cinema. In his journal, he eviscerates the director, laying the blame for the truly dreadful film³ firmly at his feet:

Green is to blame, of course—only Quinn has the ability to rise above the general ambiance of non-direction. No poetry, no mystery. And to make matters worse, they’ve cut it razor-sharp—the scenes skid and jump on so fast that there’s no sense of space or even the briefest rest.

FOWLES 2006: 39

This fast pace in an adaptation of such a cerebral and contemplative work doomed “The Magus” to the unanimous panning it received from critics. It is not surprising then, that *Daniel Martin*, written in the years during and

3 “The Magus” was such a bad film, it prompted the famous quip by Woody Allen that even appeared in Fowles’ obituary in *The Independent*: “If I had to live my life again, I’d do everything the same, except that I wouldn’t see The Magus.” 8 November 2005 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/john-fowles-325435.html>) last accessed 1/21/2016.

following the release of "The Magus" (1968), would be skeptical of the medium and the industry that was responsible for such a travesty. However, again suggesting that the author had not lost all faith in film to attain the level of contemplation he sought from his audience, Fowles did not completely turn his back on cinema. In 1981, Karel Reisz directed an adaptation of Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which was enthusiastically received by viewers and critics alike. Indeed, Fowles went on to allow four more adaptations of his work after the publication of *Daniel Martin*, the novel in which he appeared to eschew the form: specifically, "The Last Chapter" (1974), directed by David Tringham (assistant director on "The Magus") the only adaptation that Fowles praised in his journal, and which seems to have partly restored his faith in the movie machine; "The Enigma" (1980); and "The Ebony Tower" (1984).⁴ Significantly, all three of these works were completely outside of the Hollywood machine; all small budget pieces made for television or for very limited cinematic distribution. Perhaps then, it was not the moving image that Fowles condemned as irreconcilable with his artistic vision, but instead, he rejected Hollywood's profit-driven insistence on a formula to recoup huge production costs. This idea is consistent with the last pages of the novel or coda, which seems to contradict the implicit rejection of the "fascistic over-stamping of truth" afforded by the image.

In these last pages of the novel, we are left with the intriguing suggestion that a vehicle that maintains the connotative powers of written language, while also harnessing the power of what Martin witnesses while viewing a painting in the National Portrait Gallery, might present a path to "whole sight." There is a suggestion that a fusion of the contemplative novel with the visual is possible. This event occurs when Martin appears to have rejected the cinema to write his own novel. Putatively, and rather confusingly, we assume he is referring to *Daniel Martin*. Confusing, because the final sentences of the novel allude to the fact that Martin believes that "[this] novel can never be read" and therefore "lies eternally in the future" (Fowles 1977: 668). Whether *Daniel Martin* is in fact the novel to which the putative author is referring is not our chief concern here, but it does suggest that the novel form is not after all the best vehicle through which to transcend the material and evoke a more authentic Real, since it "cannot be read." Martin comes to this epiphany after encountering the self-portrait by Rembrandt, having absent-mindedly wandered into the public gallery. His thoughts about the painting would suggest that the visual has, in fact, a large part to play in the reconnection of the human mind to that which lies beyond surface realism. Martin reflects on Rembrandt's work

4 For a detailed discussion of filmic adaptations of Fowles, see Aubrey 2015.

considering the “entire knowledge of his [Rembrandt’s] own genius and of the inadequacy of genius before human reality” (Fowles 1977: 666). Additionally, as he views the painting, he notes the contrast between the culture and its surroundings; the sterility of the gallery as a stark backdrop for the richness of the work. Most importantly, he notes the ability of the work to transcend the present, the vicissitudes of public and critical tastes, and language itself:

[the] morose old Dutchman; the deepest inner loneliness, the being on trivial public show; a date beneath a frame, a presentness beyond all time, fashion, language; a puffed face, a pair of rheumy eyes, and a profound and unassuageable vision (667).

The picture is able to transcend time, just as he hoped his putative and, we are led to believe, unreadable, novel might. The picture says “all he had never managed to say and would never manage to say” (667). Perhaps then, the image and the novel have something to say, if such a fusion were possible, about the human experience, and perhaps this is the new path that is being trodden by those who wish to transcend the material and evoke a richer response in their audience, much as Martin, and we would assume, Fowles, hopes to do in his work.

5 Contemplative Cinema

Fowles’ criticism of the director Guy Green, and his rejection of the cult of Hollywood is indeed similarly echoed in more recent theory that is beginning to coalesce around the concept of contemplative cinema. Specifically, in *Slow Movies* (2014), Ira Jaffe describes a cinema of contemplation that is receptive to a more pensive and reflective spectator, “provoking new thoughts, not all of which feel good” and acting as a counterpoint to movies that foster “distraction” (Jaffe 2014: 4). These “distracting” movies are the kind that Martin (and Fowles) rejected, a reflection of our perpetual consumption of images, or what Barthes describes as a kind of “continuous voracity” (Barthes 1981: 55). They produce their own kind of realism, submerging the viewer in sensory appeals where there is no room for contemplation.

Jaffe asserts, again echoing Plotinus, that it is possible to use sensory input, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, to in Plotinus’ words, “take away everything” (*Ennead* I 6, 9). Just as Plotinus urges us to remove the distractions of the material world so that we might enter a level of contemplation that enables us to achieve a communion with the One, Jaffe also interrupts

our comfortable existence in that cluttered and over-stimulating world. Such an interruption is accomplished by interfering with our casual consumption of reality in the form of cinema. Contemplative cinema, Jaffe explains, is “a complex time, wherein aspects of the real and the imaginary, and of past, present and future, commingle [...] [with] frequent departures from chronological time and external reality—twin mainstays of slow movies” (Jaffe 2014: 5–6). Surely, these words could just as easily have appeared in the pages of *Daniel Martin*.

Avoiding the “fascistic stamp of images” (as Fowles feared mimetic verisimilitude would inflict on viewers of his novel’s screen adaptations) is also the aim of contemplative cinema. These “slow” films allow the viewer to participate more actively in creating meaning during their viewing, offering possibilities, and—most crucially—time to the viewer to augment what is intimated on screen.

Contemplative or slow movies include works like Van Sant’s *Elephant* (2005). When we consider the ways in which artists such as Van Sant describe their work, it is easy to see the resonance between their ideas and those of Plotinus. Van Sant advocates for “space to drift off and reflect on what you are thinking. Or for you to get lost in his films” (Peary: npn). Like Fowles, he does not want his films to dictate meaning to his audience and he uses phrases that are very similar to the novelist’s to articulate his hopes for the form. In a 2004 interview with *The Guardian*’s Simon Hattenstone he reflects on the state of contemporary film: “Modern-day cinema,” he opines, “takes the form of a sermon [...] Hopefully [in this film] there are as many interpretations as there are viewers” (in Jaffe 2014: 46).

Finally, it is interesting to note that the two central characters in *Daniel Martin*, Jane and Daniel, take as their reading material for the trip to Palmyra, the radical realist Georg Lukács: specifically, his work, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. First published in English in 1963, this work as well as Lukács’s thoughts generally, inform much of Fowles’ oeuvre. Although Lukács’s book stresses the importance of realism, eschewing any transcendent or “alternative” reality, it is informative to consider Lukács’s later thoughts on cinema, which also strongly resemble those of Fowles and Van Sant, and, it might be argued, also anticipate contemplative cinema and its attempt to confront its audience with a reality that is more consciously and thoughtfully consumed, encouraging an engagement with the real that exceeds the passive reception of images and sound. In a 1969 interview with Yvette Biró, Lukács reflects on the function of film to bring attention to elements of society that are often overlooked as surface detail. Film, he suggests,

has the task of representing the positive and negative aspects of society, and, in this area it is capable of assuming an essential importance, must capture the attention and reflection of the man on the street, who often skims over the facts reacting solely on a sentimental without reflection.

AITKEN 2012: 257

On the surface this might seem to be in conflict with slow cinema’s reluctance to force the viewer to contemplate anything specific, but it is compatible when one considers this reflection in light of Lukács’ earlier *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* (1963). In this work, as Aitken notes, Lukács describes the world of objects as being alien to consciousness, capitalist modernity reinforcing this subordination through the dominance of “fetishism, commodification and reification” (Aitken 2012: 76). Even more strikingly similar to both Fowles and Plotinus, however, is Lukács’ advocacy for the escape from the distractions of modernity and materialism via “identification with the province of the “soul,” and engagement with the movement of “culture” in an attempt to realize freedom and totality” (Aitken: 77). In 1981, surely anticipating such a movement as contemplative cinema, Lukács called for film to promote a comparison or leap between the “world of the everyday human being” to the “whole human being” (in Aitken: 88).

Conclusion

Contemplative cinema might come close to helping us avoid inhabiting the realm of the decorated corpse. Deleuze identifies the strength of cinema in its ability to make the connection between the self and contemplation. In an interview with Marie Guirgis, Deleuze reflects that “Cinema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind. Spiritual life is the movement of the mind. One naturally goes from philosophy to cinema, but also from cinema to philosophy” (Guirgis 2000: 366). Despite rejecting Hollywood, Deleuze, like Fowles, sees the potential for the medium. It has the ability to create a new ontology.

Such a connection between philosophy and cinema offers the potential to facilitate the same contemplation advocated by Plotinus as the only way of reaching the Nous and escaping the “decorated corpse.” In this way, the Soul can rise out of the material world and bridge the two worlds. In Plotinus, to comprehend the true nature of reality, one must recognize, as I have suggested many of Fowles’ protagonists attempt so to do, a new order of existence. In this

desired and elusive realm of understanding, the material and the sensible are seductive distractions or multiplicities. In contrast, the realm of the One or the Good is singular and immune from the infectious flux that imbues the material world with ephemerality and imperfection. It is this other realm, the realm of the One or the Good that might be glimpsed from the vantage point of the Intellect outside of the individual Soul and Body. It is this transcendent and universal real that Fowles and many of his protagonists attempt to apprehend and articulate, and in so doing, they move often uncomfortably outside of the familiar realm of the material and reflections on the decorated corpse.

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The Mystical and the Beautiful: The Construction of a Plotinian Aesthetics of Film

Cameron Barrows

How can Plotinus' mystical philosophy of perception and experience help us understand the importance of film as an art? More precisely, of an art that allows for the experience of the One and thus allows for an understanding of the Other? This question is not just crucial to the understanding of film and philosophy, but also to the nature of film within the context of global capitalism and liberal democracy. The body-soul dialectic for Plotinus is one of congruence. How do we conceive of the Plotinian soul in the postmodern life-world? Does global capitalism and liberal democracy allow for the mystical experiences or for the soul? The latter should be recognized as a noncommodifiable object. Plotinus allows us to construct a philosophical structure for a new understanding of film. A return to the study of Plotinus' philosophy is useful for the future development of the philosophy of film. Film studies have become increasingly focused on connecting film to issues of culture and society. This task is a worthy and important project, but in order to complete it one must have a highly acute awareness of the relationship between the subjective experience of film and film itself. One must not separate film from the cinematic experience and the act of watching a film, which is a passive act of becoming. Plotinus provides understanding and perspective to these questions even though over a millennium separates us from him.

Plotinus' Neoplatonist philosophy provides us a pre-phenomenological understanding of film and this is important in understanding the relationship between film theory and classical philosophy. Plotinus' philosophy is a synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Plato's Ideas become the intelligence which constructs the soul, and through the soul we arrive at the multiplicity of nature. Plotinus posits "this soul as well as the rational forming principles is an image; but that from which it came is the clear and the true and the primary, and so belongs to itself and exists for itself" (V 3, 11–14, 97). The soul for Plotinus is the principle of life. The soul contains the multitudinous nature of the universe and vice versa. But Plotinus extends his philosophy beyond this to the One, which cannot be thought of in terms of Being. It is only through the trace and action of immanence that being can be called absolute. The One for

Plotinus is free from all multiplicity beyond intelligibility. This is the nexus of Plotinus' philosophy and the genesis of mysticism. Through Plotinus, film theory is put in touch with an aspect of Western philosophy: the light and space that is beyond the intellect. That is experiences and knowledge that cannot be described in terms of Aristotelian and Stoic categories. This aspect has not been seriously struggled with within film theory. The need for film theory to understand the One as an integral aspect of the cinematic experience is crucial to the development of new cinematic ethics and aesthetics.

The absolute and the One are the radical origins of Being and both are immanent rather than transcendental. That is even nature contemplates as Plotinus writes in the third *Ennead* eighth tractate the only way to be aware of the One is through contemplation. Therefore the transcendental One is inherently immanent. The One emanates Being, that is, being explicates Being. Plotinus' One deconstructs the dialectic of cause and effect through its unity. Plotinus' optical philosophy is one that contains an entire history, ontology, cosmology, ethics, poetics, and aesthetics. Plotinus turns away from the dialectical philosophy of Plato to the philosophy of the One and to Parmenides when he portrays the apparition of the essence from the One by emanation and descent in opposition to Plato's transcendence. He also observes that Plato is unable to overcome the problem of the One and the Many with his theory of the forms. These paradigmatic shifts are crucial to understanding the context of Plotinus' philosophy and his revolutionizing of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy.

Plotinus' synthesis of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy is evident in his radical understanding of time and space, which is crucial to our understanding of cinema. The cosmology and ontology as understood by Plato and Aristotle was radically different from what it was during the early third century. Plotinus gives the same priority to the now as Hegel does in *The Jena System*: time as a present-centric quality exists within the schema of the philosophy of nature. This is different from Aristotle. Aristotle states that the essence of time is in the now. He understands the "now" as *ὁρὸς* while Plotinus understands the "now" as a boundary. This "now" should be understood in the Aristotelian sense as the moments which compose the movement from A–B. But there is still a boundary between each now. Plotinus overcomes this through his insistence that the human subject temporalizes its world; that is, we as human beings emanate time as well as the One. In other words, Aristotle understands the now as a moment *στιγμή* while for Plotinus this now is a point, which is the "absolute this." Phillip Cary in his book *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* writes, "Plotinus could affirm the infinity of the One only because he was willing to affirm its formlessness—not of course that it is devoid of Form like mere matter, but

rather that it is *above* Form, just as it is above being and knowing" (Cary 2000: 26). Aristotle follows the tradition in connecting χρόνος with the σφαίρα, while Plotinus stresses the importance of the circular nature of time and flux. Plotinus escapes the Aristotelian tendency and exposes the fundamental flaws in his connections between the "now," the ὅρος the στιγμή, and the τότε τι.

The temporality of film is one that is in flux, and it is similar to Plotinus' understanding of time as the restless movement of the soul; a continual entity always in intelligible flux. Plotinus' understanding of time allows him to construct a rigorous and methodical philosophy of light that is a mystical philosophy of life. This philosophy shows us how to see the world through the mind, which is also the act of cinema. It is in this way that Plotinus can help elucidate questions regarding the phenomenology of film and phenomenological sociality of the cinematic experience as communal. Phenomenology should be understood as a philosophy structured on the subject's subjectivity and its relation to objects and the world.

1 Film and Plotinus

Film is an infinite entity in its composition. This is of course unconscious to the viewer of the film for we only perceive the finished image rather than the frames that construct the finalized image. This and the fact that film is constructed for the masses who experience it collectively within the darkened cinema allows film to be an immanent medium of social change. The unitary experience of film as a continuous entity that is composed of a multiplicity of parts mirrors the One and allows for film to portray these concepts in an aesthetic fashion. Film allows for the genesis of an aesthetic revival of Plotinian concepts. The development of a Plotinian aesthetics of film, one that focuses upon the subjective understandings of beauty and truth for the cinematic experience and temporality, is akin to Plotinus' notion of self-perception and knowledge. Plotinus writes: "[Beauty] is something which we become aware of even at the first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood it, recognizes and welcomes it and as it were adapts itself to it" (I 6, 2–5, 237). For Plotinus each soul is potentially divine and the soul is theophanic. That is our awareness of the sacredness of humanity and the sharing of the experience of life with others. A divine spark is contained within the subject; the task of the subject is to rediscover this theophany apart from the subjective body. The Plotinian soul is predicated upon the knowing, rather than on the *autokinēsis* of the life-world. Plotinus' philosophy is necessarily an external and internal

controlling of nature. This is what leads to freedom and this freedom is akin to the freedom of the cinematic experience from both the perspective of the viewer and the film director.

The phenomenology of film and the experience of film-itself-for-the-subject is crucial to our understanding of the philosophy of film. Film-itself-for-the-subject is the consumption of the individual in the film. When the individual becomes transfixed to the moving images and concurrent sounds, then a film wholly possesses the viewer. Plotinus developed a unique understanding of experience, perception, and of the One. The One for Plotinus may at first glance be unrelated to film, but the importance of the mystical experience of the One and the subjective experience of film within the cinema is similar. The subject in the darkened cinema does not see anything but is affected by its own capacity to see. Perception in the theatre is not the experience of something—the film as a formless continuous entity—but rather perception of the formlessness of the film. This potentiality between experience of nothing and something is the experience of passivity, which is the experience of the cinema. Plotinus' conception of temporality as nodal and subjective allows for the positing of a phenomenological freedom that exists only in such a temporality. This temporality is rooted in the possibilities of newness and freedom in which every subject is a beginning, a genesis. It allows for the construction of pseudo-mystical experiences and emotions within the cinematic experience. Plotinus' idea of temporality is crucial to understanding his philosophy of sense-perception and knowledge. This is fundamental to his concept of the One, and his entire mystical philosophy rests upon this.

2 Mystical Cinema

We cannot understand the essence and structure of Plotinus' philosophy and its applications if we do not also consider the character of the mystical experience. The Plotinian state is not merely abstract possibilities but actual experiences. Plotinus provides us with an autobiographical account at IV 8, 1 where he writes:

Often I have woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part ... Then after that rest in the divine, when I have come down from Intellect to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down,

and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body. (IV 8, 1–11, 367)

The mystical experiences that Plotinus describes have a sense of timelessness, a loss of the self in the One, and a temporary loss of self as a body. Film allows for the suspension of the body, the unreality of the body. When one watches a film the world outside fades away. We become immersed in the simulacrum of the film. It is in this immersion that the viewer and subject enter into the pseudo-Plotinian state of mystical experience. This departure, or in the cinematic case, is a forgetting of the individual's body seated in the cinema, as well as a connection to the constructed temporality and consciousness of the film. The most important facet of this suspension is the sharing of this experience within a cinema. The self-referential nature of cinema constructs the cinematic self. The very act of watching a film is a passive act of becoming. The cinematic self is constructed from the interaction between the film and the viewer in the darkened cinema. This event allows for the suspension and substitution of temporalities and worlds. The experience of watching a film is unlike any other, for the subject's realization of their body dissolves and they become transfixed to the images. Plotinus states that the personal essence is a dogmatic limitation to overcome. Therefore Plotinus rids himself of the problem of "principium individuationis" in space and time. Ideas do not interact with each other within space and time but rather exist outside of the temporal. The cinema acts similarly by suspending time and space and projecting it upon the subject.

In the creation of the space or event of the suspension of the individual in time there arises a space of communion in which subjects exist as subjective to one another, that is, in the absence of the Other. In this space, the Other does not exist in the place of the object, but rather the inverse happens. This inverse function of the object allows for the construction of a subjective space. This space exists through the interaction between two beings, but instead of these beings seeing each other as only objects, the act of communion allows for objects to be viewed as subjects because of the loss, or rather negation of, the Other. The space or event of the suspension of the individual still bears an infinite trace of humanity. The other is indispensable for humanity. Without the other there is no self, for we always exist as other unconsciously.

Emmanuel Levinas' notions of the trace, which he first expounds in his text *Totality and Infinity*, can be defined as "a presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, or what is always past" (Levinas 1987: 105). Levinas' trace bears resemblance to Plotinus' One and the conception of a system

beyond Being, which we can recognize through various activities. Levinas' philosophy and its inherent mysticism and obvious indebtedness to Neoplatonist thought allows for an extension of Plotinus' philosophy. Levinas' philosophy allows for the development of a complex world philosophy that has its nexus within the ethical rather than the metaphysical. This is evident in the acute ethical considerations and questions implicit, for example, in the cinema of Terrence Malick and Andrei Tarkovsky, as will be shown below. All aesthetic mediums—and film especially—bear Levinas' trace within them. Film's ability to portray the Other as other, and not to objectivize this otherness is crucial towards its continual development as a revolutionary medium. It is this trace that allows us to develop a Plotinian aesthetics of film and eventually a cinematic ethics, politics, and metaphysics.

Levinas finds solace in the Neoplatonist and Plotinian philosophy that is similar to his own ethics and philosophy of the world. Philosophy of world should be understood as the subjects' relation to the material world in all its manifestations as well as the corresponding metatheory of these relations. The Neoplatonists' understanding of the subject, and of its relations to others and the world through *eidos* and the conflagration of self and Other bear great significance for Levinas and his philosophy of the trace. The trace is beyond intelligibility; it is not an Edenic paradise or lost age but the notion of memory of humanity as One. There exists though for Levinas a trace within a trace, an infinite trace, which is the foundation for his ethics. All philosophy is striving towards this ancient forgotten trace. We are always invoking a certain amount of this trace to humanness. This unconscious humanness is the trace of Levinas' ethics. The trace is an immanent entity capable of connecting all human subjects, not just those currently alive, but also the peoples of past and future. Plotinus invokes such a perennial philosophy in his conception of the One the essential ephemerality of the trace allows it to be portrayed in a cinematic context. Films can capture this trace without degrading the essence of it. Film has the ability to invoke the emotions of the mystical experience. The films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Terrence Malick contain this trace of humanity through their vitalism and continued questioning of ethical and existential problems.

3 Terrence Malick and Mystical Cinema

Terrence Malick is an American film auteur who originally studied philosophy and translated Martin Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes*. He studied film at the AFI and made his directorial debut with *Badlands* in 1973. His films since,

like *Days of Heaven* (1978) and *The Thin Red Line* (1998) are both historical pieces portraying the existential doubt and search for meaning and beauty within our lived experiences. His focus upon American characters and history as well as his continual return to the past are attempts to overcome the loss of meaning in a postmodern world. Malick's films are rigorous and philosophically astute portrayals of universal human experience and its condition. Malick's cinematography is a natural philosophy of sensuality. This sensual philosophy is a synthesis between art and truth and it is catalyzed through the dialectical tension between freedom and necessity. This tension and synthesis allow us to ask critical questions through both film and philosophy about the phenomenological sociality of cinema.

The subject within the cinema is akin to the subject chained within Plato's allegory of the cave, and leads us to the question, how we can develop a phenomenological ethics of the other within the cinema. The way in which both Malick and Tarkovsky's films preserve the inter-subjective through the maintained subjectivity of the characters and actors allows them to construct a cinematic site of communion, which overcomes individual alienation. This experience is inherently pseudo-mystical, for the audience becomes a one through the mass phenomenological experience and emotion of watching a film. Of course, this is not true of most films, and most cinema falls into the pitfalls of grounding and objectivity.

Malick's temporal syntheses between past, present, and the timeless generates a dialectics that is both essential and new in its juxtaposition. I understand the timeless images of Malick's films to be those that are so far in the future or the past that it becomes impossible to say whether they are images of a far past or future. The scene of the crocodile in the opening of *The Thin Red Line* is an example of this. We also find these images and scenes in *The Tree of Life*, especially in the scenes of star and planet formation and in the scene of the dinosaurs and the genesis of altruism. This fictionalization of the biological evolution of ethics is both cinematically, philosophically, engaging and thought provoking. There is a mystical aspect to Malick's dialectics and films in his harkening to both past, future, and the timeless. In his films *Days of Heaven*, *A Thin Red Line*, *The Tree of Life*, and *A New World* (as well as in his un-manifested projects *The English Speaker*, which is about Josef Breuer's analysis of Anna O, a script about Jerry Lee Lewis, and his idea of a film of the life of Joseph Merrick separately made by David Lynch as *The Elephant Man*), he portrays a continual return to the historical in his projects, which reflects this philosophizing of the world. A continual expansion of the past and an expression of Heidegger's notion of grounding are necessary to understanding the "subjectivity of the subject itself." This grounding is rooted in the subjects'

own transcendence and is crucial to understanding Malick's cinema. Malick's films, through their use of temporality, develop a cinematic "grounding" of the subject as the viewer.

Malick's films can be understood as distortions of time and space because film is a porous homotopic medium that is constantly in deformation and transformation. Gilles Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2* that "the image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time" (Deleuze 1989: 125). The temporality of a film or films can be understood as a topological process or structure. It is the space of cinema, in which the Other and the one are conflated and eventually synthesized. The inner geometry and forms of Malick's and Tarkovsky's films construct an immanent and mystical or spiritual form of cinema, one predicated on the metaphysical rather than the physical. This cinema is necessary for the development of new film aesthetics and ethics of cinema. The importance of temporality to convey the emotions of the mystical as well as the cinematography and to control the moving image is crucial to the mysticism of their films. Malick uncovers in his films the essential and fundamental problems of metaphysics. Films' ability to ask existential questions in an aesthetic fashion, and to truly affect the viewer is the immanent dynamis of film. The immanent dynamis in Malick's films expresses a negative mysticism or theology in opposition to the positivistic sciences developed since the twelfth century. This tradition of usurpation of the rational is an important aspect of film. The structured collage of sound, image, and thoughts allows for not only the unconscious experience of the Other but also for the unconscious education of the masses.

4 Sensual Phenomenology and Mystical Cinema

The application of Plotinus' philosophy to film studies allows for a new understanding of not only the nature of film and its metaphysical relations, but also of the experience of film for the subject. The philosophy and ontology of Plotinus is an optical philosophy described by Pierre Hadot like this:

For Plotinus, as for Plato, vision consists in contact between the inner light of the eye and exterior light. Yet Plotinus concludes from this that when vision becomes spiritual, there is no longer any distinction between inner and outer light. Vision is light, and light is vision. There is a kind of self-vision of light, in which light is, as it were, transparent to itself.

HADOT 1993: 62

Film is also a medium and philosophy of light. The subject in the cinema becomes lost and consumed in the light of the images of the film. It is in this space of light that the mystical experience can occur. Ideas for Plotinus are luminous, pure light, divorced from tactile sensation. Plotinus abstracts space through the construction of spatialization. The optical philosophical discrepancies between Plato and Plotinus are evident in book six of *The Republic* 507c. Plato's optics lacks spatialization and thus has become abstracted in the centuries between him and Plotinus. This means that the mathematization of space has changed our perception of it and its phenomenological relation to the human subject. The abstraction of spatialization is necessary for the development of cinematic aesthetics. This new phenomenological aesthetics is one in which the experience of beauty for the subject is just as crucial as the film itself. A Plotinian understanding of cinema is not just concerned with film as projected but also the act of the film watching the subject. Any film is an act of becoming, for this is essential to the ontology of film. The film is a mirror of lived experience and vice versa.

The aestheticization of the mystical experience inherent in a cinematic portrayal allows for experience and understanding of beauty as posited by Plotinus. The film also watches the viewer, and this constructs a pseudo-mystical experience for the viewer in the cinema. The way film constructs the temporality of the space it inhabits and allows for the viewer to enter different temporalities and worlds. This makes it an immanent medium that synthesizes the relationship between ethics, politics, and aesthetics. Actual manifestations of this in film can be found in Terrence Malick's oeuvre and also Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Rublyov*. Malick's cinematic philosophy confronts Martin Heidegger's notion of the "*Vergessenheit des Seins*" or "oblivion of being" that all has become meaningless in our postmodern world, that we can no longer ask ontologically valid questions about ourselves and the world through its abstraction. Malick's cinematic confrontation allows for the overcoming of this oblivion and the development of new ethics, politics, and human interactions.

Malick's and Tarkovsky's films allow for a dichotomy between specific being and Being. Cinema's ability to make visible in time what is invisible outside of cinema is what makes it an immanent medium. Cinema, in its construction of moving images and sounds, makes visible our invisible world, but then what remains invisible within cinema? Our memory of the cinematic experience that exists after the experience has ended allows us to connect the image to time. Their ability to reframe existential questions and aestheticize them employs a philosophy of world. Malick's and Tarkovsky's films deconstruct the Kantian philosophy of the world. This deconstruction is the abandonment of

causal necessity for events and actions. This paradigm shift signifies that the laws of nature are contingent and that Humans cannot exist without the world, nor the world without humans. Their film philosophies suggest to the viewer that in this contemporary world of chaos we must disregard the principle of sufficient reason yet retain the principle of non-contradiction. Malick's dialectic of genesis and extinction displays aestheticized versions of these notions allowing them to be understood in a broader context. This philosophy is the construction of spiritual experience and material genesis made manifest through the cinematic experience. Only in life does time have meaning. Film's ability to not be reduced to a representation and to portray complex fictional worlds and societies allows it to be a transcendental medium that synthesizes the tripartite relationship between aesthetics, ethics, and politics. That is film as an immanent medium, one that allows for the connection between the ethical other, the relations between subjects and others (Politics), and the essential subliminal nature of film (aesthetics). The theoretical connections between these forces is necessary for a true understanding of film and the development of a Plotinian aesthetics that allows for the further construction of a sensual phenomenological cinema. Accordingly Nariman Skakov writes in *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time*:

While the phenomenological nature of space and time is tackled by thinkers by exclusively verbal means, the director's [Tarkovsky] films present *visions* of space and time. Spatio-temporal discontinuity and disconnectedness are characteristic of Tarkovsky's cinema: it lacks the homogeneously stretched four-dimensional continuum. The director displaces topographical coordinates and imposes temporal leaps: he enters the cinematic labyrinth at times by means of a spatial aberration and at times through a temporal anomaly. These displacements and leaps create narrative digressions, which consequently disorientate the viewer.

SKAKOV 2012: 12

Skakov understands Tarkovsky's film ontology as a distortion of time and space. But I think that understanding film in terms of Plotinian aesthetics allows one to expand this interpretation and to state that the ontology of film is the distortion of time and space. Tarkovsky understands film as sculpting in time in the way in which Plotinus understands the philosophical self as "never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out of you, till you see self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat" (I 6, 13–15, 259). As Bergson's view is in accord with Plotinus' thesis that space is time, a reversal of Bergson's statement that time is space places Plotinus within a Continental philosophical

tradition. Yet the true philosophical and mystical power of cinema is its ability to allow the viewers to draw in upon themselves and discover themselves as psychic beings. Plotinus' ascetic knowledge stems autarkic solitude through reflections of the self. Immanence is the very crux of reflection erecting a new psyche. Julia Kristeva writes that "the Western soul is no longer that of a Platonistic *Eros Pteros* obsessed with the supralunar world, but that of a thinking space fastened on the same through the intermediary of the One, both origin and light of thought" (Kristeva 2002: 174–175). Western innerness thus becomes externalized and abstracted and this innerness is manifested in the space of psychic solitude. Plotinus' conception of being-alone-with-oneself is the ontology of the cinema. The mythic tragedy, which is the original realm of the mystical, has been transformed into the space of the modern media. This space which film inhabits is crucial to the mystical, for it conflates the inner and outer life. This conflation is the aesthetic thesis of film as a medium. Plotinus' philosophy is a philosophy of film, for it is concerned with beauty, perception, knowledge, and the pseudo-mystical experience of the cinema. The possibility of film is also a possibility of ethics and politics, for film has the ability to revolutionize the world. But it requires the correct philosophical bedrock. The Plotinian philosophy and schema is essential to this foundation in understanding the phenomenological relationship between the viewer and film.

The Plotinian cinematic philosophy, through its focus of not just the film as subject but also the viewer, can construct a metaphysical schema of the phenomenology of the cinema. This phenomenology is crucial in understanding how human subjects engage with films and vice versa, which allows us to construct films that are Other-centric. This ability to move outside of the self has been a facet of cinema since its inception, but it has not been developed into a radical alterity. The majority of film does not question itself as film as well as the ethics and aesthetics of film as distinct and unique. This lack of critical inquiry must be awakened and the pseudo-mystical experience of the cinema allows for that. For Plotinus the world of the senses is metaphorical. It is through segregation from the world that Plotinus tries to reconnect with the One. Plotinus' conclusion of the *Enneads* must be kept in mind, for it is crucial to understanding his philosophy of the world and of mystical experiences. He states: "So then the seer does not see and does not distinguish and does not imagine two, but it is as if he had become someone else and he is not himself and does not count as his own there, but has come to belong to that and so is one, having joined, as it were, center to center" (VI 10, 13–17, 341) The experience of the trace within cinema is the connection of the soul to the universal humanity which presupposes all of Being. Film very much segregates us from the world. When watching a film we are placed within a suspended

temporality with the mind transfixed upon the moving image. It is in this suspension that we are able to connect with the Other.

Conclusion

Malick and Tarkovsky both construct an immanent and mystical form of cinema predicated on the metaphysical rather than the physical. These cinemas of the sublime are necessary for the development of a Plotinian aesthetics and ethics of cinema. The importance of temporality to convey the emotions of the mystical as well as the cinematography and the control of the moving image is crucial to the mysticism of their films. Both Malick and Tarkovsky uncover in their films the essential and fundamental problems of metaphysics. The Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics' apogee question is "What is the being of beings?" The protean question in Plotinus, "why is there being rather than nothing?" is continued and still struggled with in both film and contemporary metaphysics. Film's ability to ask existential questions in an aesthetic fashion and to truly affect the viewer is the immanent *dynamis* of film. The immanent *dynamis* in Plotinus and films expresses a negative mysticism or theology in opposition to the positivistic sciences developed since the twelfth century. This tradition of usurpation of the rational is an important aspect of film. The structured collage of sound, image, and thoughts allows for not only the experience of the Other unconsciously but also the unconscious education of the masses. This is the revolutionary power of film to educate the masses across all economic, cultural, and social boundaries and divisions.

In an archival interview *A Message to Young People* released in the *Sight and Sound Poll 2012: Andrei Rublyov* Tarkovsky states, "The individual must learn to be on his own as a child for this doesn't mean to be alone: it means not to get bored with oneself which is a very dangerous symptom ... almost a disease" (Criterion 2012). This ontological disease of the present is manifested in our media, and especially in our films. The current trend within cinema is to portray people as segregated from this world, as existing in a parallel world in which the common tropes of life are fact, and the true complexities of our lived experiences are absent. This lethargic cinema of the self must be revolutionized into a radical cinema of alterity. Plotinus allows us to overcome the ego through his philosophy of the One, which in its infinity constructs the contemplative space devoid of ego. According to Levinas, it is in the desert of the cinema in which the Other resides. Levinas writes in *Proper Names*: "We returned to the desert, space without countryside, or to a space made to measure—like a tomb—to contain us; we returned to the space receptacle" (Levinas 1997: 121).

This is the space of cinema, one in which the Other and the One are conflated and eventually synthesized. This mystical philosophy is a geometry of the loss of the self, which film can reflect through its intentional construction and through the inner geometry unique and universal to all films. This new conception of film allows us to construct beyond merely a Plotinian aesthetics and develop an ethics and politics as well. The importance of Plotinian thought to this project is crucial, for without a tradition of pre-phenomenological philosophy, which is evident throughout Plotinus' philosophy, one could not embark on such a task. The pre-phenomenological can be found in Plotinus' metaphysics of time and is pre-phenomenological in its structure. The necessity of internalized human consciousness is crucial to Plotinus' philosophy of time: even though Plotinus challenges the phenomenological notion of human temporality by stating the superiority of the eternal omnitemporal over that of the human. Despite these oppositions, Plotinian philosophy can be expanded and better understood through developing a phenomenological foundation in the philosophy of Plotinus. The construction of new ways of seeing, new perceptions of films and so forth is of the utmost importance for the future development of both film studies and philosophy. But this must be done carefully and rigorously, for the construction of new modalities of aesthetics and perceptions must be philosophically sound and place Plotinus within the tradition of film-philosophy and phenomenology that is found in works of Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze. Plotinus can continue this tradition of understanding film as a collage that allows for multiplicities of space and time, virtual and physical, all actualized in the cinematic experience. This understanding of cinema allows us to return to the sensible: the origin of knowledge.

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Index

- absolute 54, 59, 166 n. 9, 229–230
action movie 13, 127
Adam 80
Aegisthus 76
Aerope 76
Aesop 67
Agathias 74 n. 23
Alcestis 82
Amelius 72 n. 14
Andrew, Dudley 18
Angelopoulos, Theo 9, 154
animated images 71–81, 84
animism 34, 39, 204
Aphrodite 79, 80
Apollo 117
Apollonius of Tyana 78
Apollonius Rhodius 67 n. 3
Arcadia 68
Arcesilaus 92
Aristotle 1, 51, 53, 85, 125, 145, 160, 171, 179,
181, 211, 229–31, 240
 De anima 160 n. 4
 Metaphysics 160 n. 4
 Nicomachean Ethics 85
 Poetics 145
Arnheim, Rudolf 19
Arnold, Jack 86 n. 51
astraptein 106
Astruc, Alexandre 24
ataraxia 92
Athamas 76
Athena 80, 117 n. 35
Atreus 76
Aurelian, Emperor 78
axiomata 80
Ayfre, Amédée 24–25, 67 n. 1

Bartas, Sharunas 154
Barthes, Roland 225–26
Basil the Great 58
Bazin, André 5, 12
beauty 6, 10, 12, 39, 40, 49, 55, 58, 94, 109,
126, 128–34, 136, 145, 148–50, 187, 188,
189, 191, 194, 231, 237
becoming 128–29, 229, 237

being 4–5, 12, 15, 29, 31, 107–13, 123–25,
229–230, 234, 237, 239
Benjamin, Walter 11, 24
Bergson, Henri 3–4, 18–19 n. 6, 33, 136,
153, 238, 241
Biró, Yvette 226
Blake, William 87
Blessing, Kimberly 91–92
body 2, 95–96, 109, 131, 196, 197, 198,
199–200, 204, 206, 216, 233
 body art 191
 embodiment 192, 193, 194, 195, 197, 198,
202, 203, 204, 205
 body-soul 229
Boobbyer, Philip 49
Book of Revelation 57, 60
Bordwell, David 128, 145
Brahma 72
Brakhage, Stan 154–55
Bréhier, Emile 3, 12, 16, 20, 25
Brun, Jean 17
Bruno, Giordano 4
Buffy 70

Calchas 77
Calypso 85, 103, 151
caméra-stylo 24
Carneades 92
Carrey, Jim 91
Carroll, Noël 191
Carterius 72 n. 14
Carthage 82
catharsis 114, 178–80
Chaldeans 75
chaos 77, 238
character 144–47
Chebar, river 75
Christian Platonism 84
chronos see time
Cicero 85 n. 50
Circe 85, 103, 151
Cleopatra 77
close-up 21, 34–41
Coeur fidèle (Epstein) 35–37
collective thinking 138

- communication 159–66, 177–83
 consciousness 223
 Constantine, Emperor 78
 contemplation vii, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10–14, 190,
 192, 193, 194, 195, 200, 202, 204, 215,
 225–27
 Contemplative Cinema *see* Slow Cinema
 contemporary art 187, 188, 191
 contingency 28, 99
 cosmology 106, 230
 Cronos 79
 cyberspace 73
 Cynics 82

daimones 84
 Danto, Arthur 191, 198
Dark City 87
 dark room (Locke) 102
 deconstruction 4, 239
 Deianeira 81 n. 42
deixeis 75
 Deleuze, Gilles 3–4, 16–17, 227, 236, 241
 time-image 4, 153
 movement-image 145, 151
 Delphic maxim 68, 195
 Demeter 83 n. 44
 demiurge 71
 demons 68–69, 76
 Descartes, René 92
 doubt 91, 92, 98
 mind-body dualism 98
 desire 144–45
 detachment 69, 147, 150
 dialectic 135, 164, 173, 230, 235
 dialogue 106
dianoia see discursive thought
diastasis 3 n. 7
 Dio Chrysostom 72 n. 16
 Diocletian 82
 Diodorus Siculus 82
 Dionysius the Areopagite 56
 Dionysus 110, 115, 117 n. 35, 202
 discursive thought (or non-discursive
 thought) 2 n. 4, 8 n. 1, 9, 11, 17, 22, 31, 94,
 158–61
 divine, *see* God
 Doane, Mary Anne 28
 dream 17–19, 70, 72, 78, 116
 Duhamel, Georges 11

durée pure 4

 Eckhart, Meister 4
 economy of mediums 205
écriture 24–25
 editing 9, 15, 16, 168
eidolon 79, 107, 111, 112, 119, 120, 161
eidos see Forms
eikasia 94
eikōn 159, *see also* image
 Eisenstein, Sergei 23–24, 168, 173
 Elagabal of Emesa 78
 Electra 80
 Eliot, T. S. 81 n. 42
 emotion 148
 empathy 131
 epistrophē vii, 108, 113, 120, 181
epochē see suspension of judgment
 Epstein, Jean 21, 28–29, 30–39, 40–41
eros 97, 102, 112, 177, 239
 essence 29, 134–39
 Eunapius 73 n. 18
 experience 216
 experimental cinema 152, 155–56
 Ezekiel 74–75, 76, 78

 Falzon, Christopher 99
 Ficino, Marsilio 22
 film (definition) 123–24
 Florensky, Pavel 44, 45, 46–59
 formalism 19, 158
 formlessness 152, 230, 232
 Forms vii, 80–81, 108, 125–28, 131–34,
 148–50, 155
 Foucault, Michel 203
 Fowles, John 5, 210–212, 216–25
 The Collector 217
 Daniel Martin 217–19
 The French Lieutenant's Woman 224
 The Magus 223–24
 Frampton, Daniel 14, 16
 Frank, Simeon 45, 47–54, 56–59
 freedom 91, 93, 95, 99, 100–101, 102, 103
 Freud, Sigmund 18–19, 195
 Fried, Michael 201, 204, 205, 206

 game 165
 Gance, Abel 24
 German Idealism 4

- gestalt 204, 205
 Glaucon 87
 Gnostics 6, 71, 86, 135, 181
 God 22, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 58, 62
 Goethe, Johan Wolfgang 52, 79 n. 34
 Good, the 15, 25, 32, 40, 49, 53–55, 106, 108,
 110, 111–13, 116, 132–34, 159, 160, 178–186,
 211, 214, 228
 grace 8–9, 31
 Gray, Hugh 5–6
 Guerra, Tonino 47, 59–60

 Hadot, Pierre 10, 12, 13, 15–16, 23, 40, 185, 236
 Hamann, Johan Georg 18
Harry Potter 70
 Harris, Ed 91
 Hausman, Carl 206
 Hecate 73
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 4, 188,
 191, 230
 Heidegger, Martin 5, 234–35, 237
 Hellas 72
 Hellene 74, 75
 Hephaestus 202
 Heracles 67, 81, 82, 83
 Heraclitus 6, 56, 61, 70 n. 12
 Hercules *see* Heracles
 Hermetic Corpus 67, 73
 heroism 81, 179–80
 Heron of Alexandria 68
 Hesychios of Sinai, Saint 68
 hieroglyphs 22–25, 161, 167
 Hildegard of Bingen 80
 Hollywood 210, 218, 220–21, 223–25
 Homer 77, 82 n. 43, 85
 Hou, Hsiao-hsien 154–55
 Hylas 67, 69, 81, 82
hylē vii, *see also* matter

 Iamblichus 73, 109 n. 12
 icons 51, 52, 57, 79, 84
 ideas 80, 127, 128, 131, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138,
 139, 141, 229, 233, 237
 ignorance 56–57
 image vii, 59, 107, 134–39, 159, 161–63, 166,
 182, 193–95, 202–203, 207, 222
 imitation 188–90, 198
 immanence 153, 229, 239
 immortality 71, 80, 82, 85

Inception 73 n. 20
 ineffable 3, 28, 31, 44, 46, 51–52, 57, 58,
 211, 213
 Ino 76
 Intellect (*nous*) 2–3, 6, 8 n. 1, 15, 18, 19,
 29–32, 38, 39–40, 44, 48, 49, 57–58, 80,
 95, 96, 100, 106, 107, 109–11, 112 n. 22, 116
 n. 32, 119, 125, 131, 132–34, 136, 137, 144,
 147–51, 152, 153, 160, 161, 162, 163, 181–83,
 186, 193, 211–20, 228
 intelligible 2, 125, 126, 131
 Israel 76
 Ithaca 83, 85, 103
 Ivanov, Vyacheslav 169 n. 14

 Jaffe, Ira 9, 225–26
 Jehoiachin, King 75
 John, Apostle 67
 John Chrysostom 79
 John Damascene, Saint (John of
 Damascus) 79 n. 36, 84 n. 47
 John the Cross 81 n. 42
 Julian, Emperor 73, 78, 79 n. 33

 Kant, Immanuel 188, 195, 200
katoptron 67
 Kians 82
 Kierkegaard, Søren 101
 kinship 120, 164–65, 167–68
 Kios 81
 Komnenian iconoclasm 84
 Kracauer, Siegfried 24
 Kristeva, Julia 239

 Lacan, Jacques 170 n. 16
 Land of Oz 69, 71
 language 51
 leap of faith (Kierkegaard) 101
 Lesbos of Mytilene 77
 Levinas, Emmanuel 233–34, 240
 Libanius 78
 light 49, 58, 107–111, 182–84, 213, 215,
 216, 237
 Lisandro, Alfonso 9, 19
 Locke, John 102
logos 106–108, 117
 long camera take 15, 19–20, 46, 60–61,
 154–55
Lord of the Rings 117

- Lost Horizon* 118–21
 love 40–41
 see also eros
 Lucian of Samosata 76, 77 n. 30
 Lukács, George 226–27
 Lynch, David 156, 235

 Magrittean cyclorama 101
 Malick, Terrence 86, 234–40
 Markandeya 72
Matrix, The 71, 84, 87
 Neo 83
 matter vii, 2, 48, 110, 126
 Maximus of Ephesus 73
 McElhone, Natascha 93
 Merkabah 74, 75
 metamorphosis 13, 137, 217
 metaphor 51, 173, 189, 194, 239
metaphora see metaphor
 metonymy 8, 20–22
 Middle Platonists 48
mimesis 1 n. 2, 114
 Mindscreen 16
 minimalism 196, 201, 203–4, 205
 Mirror of Dionysus 61 n. 3
 mirror vii, 67–68, 106, 110–11, 115, 201, 202,
 217, 237
 see also reflection
 Mnemosyne 77
 monism 159
 montage 19, 23, 35, 45–46, 168–69, 173
 Moon, figure 79
 morality, film 71–72, 86, 114
 Morin, Edgar 70, 83
 Mulhall, Stephen 127
 Muratov, Pavel 46–47
 mysticism 29, 40, 55, 74, 216, 229–30, 232–36

 Narcissus 67, 203
 narrative 9, 11, 16–18, 22, 37, 45, 145–155, 117,
 170, 174, 207, 214, 230–32, 288
 nature 52–53, 55, 106–8, 110, 118, 146, 165, 173,
 188–89, 230–31
 Nauman, Bruce 6, 187, 188, 191–93, 197–207
 artistic project 188, 192–93
 conceptualism 192–93, 199
 selfhood 188, 196–97, 205–6
 From Hand to Mouth 197–200, 203,
 204, 205

Live-Taped Video Corridor 201–3
Lighted Performance Box 203–6
 negative theology 240
 Nestorian solution 83
 Niccol, Andrew 91, 94
 Nicephorus of Constantinople 84 n. 47
 Nicholas of Cusa 56
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 195
 Nilus, the Scholastic 73–74
noesis 2 n. 4, 17, 94
 Nolan, Christopher 73 n. 20
nous see intellect
 Numenius of Apamea 74
 Nymphs 67, 82
 Cave of the 83

 Ocean, god 78
 Odysseus 71, 83, 85, 103, 120, 151
 One, the vii, viii, 3–4, 29, 32, 39–40, 47–49,
 51–59, 99, 100, 102, 151–53, 212, 232
 organic 4, 8, 14, 16, 19, 135, 169 n. 14
 Orpheus 115, 117, 120
 Orthodox Christians 5, 44, 55, 62, 79, 84,
 159, 186
 Other, the 233–40, 81
 Ovid 67

 Paganism 79
 pantomimes 75–78, 84
 Parmenides 5–6, 160
 Pausanias 68
 perception 11, 20, 25, 39–40, 125, 130–31, 134,
 145–46, 159, 215–17, 229, 232
 Pericles 77
 Pheidias 69, 72, 189, 191, 204
 statue of Zeus 72, 189, 190, 194, 204
phantasia katalēptikē 92
 phenomenology 25, 28, 32–33, 177, 231–32,
 235–39, 241
phorai 75
physis see nature
pistis 94
 Plagens, Peter 191, 192, 193, 199, 201
 Plato viii, 1, 67 n. 2, 68, 69 n. 10–11, 74 n.
 24–25, 75, 76, 77, 79 n. 34, 83, 84, 85 n.
 49, 91, 92, 94, 106, 125, 135, 189, 196, 198,
 202, 204, 212, 229–30, 240
 allegory of the cave viii–ix, 1, 68–69, 91,
 93–95, 149, 217, 235

- Forms 15, 17, 20, 30, 94–95,
 96, 214
 divided line 94
 Seahaven allegory 93–95
Cratylus 67 n. 2
Euthydemus 75 n. 27
Gorgias 118
Ion 75 n. 27
Laws 85 n. 49
Parmenides 212
Phaedrus 74 n. 24, 83, 110
Philebus 1 n. 2, 116
Republic 68 n. 9, 75 n. 27, 76, 93, 94, 100,
 106 n. 1, 113, 117, 120, 183, 237
Sophist 127–28
Statesman 69 n. 11
Symposium 112
Timaeus 1, 16, 106
 Platonists 70–71
Pleasantville 69
 Pliny 68
 plot 171
 Plutarch 75 n. 26
 Polyhymnia 77
polytheoron 68
 Pomerants, Grigory 46
 Porphyry 72 n. 14, 83–84
 Life of Plotinus 72 n. 14
 Praxiteles 69
prelest 79, 81, 84
 privacy 102
 Proclus 202
 projection 193–94, 195, 205, 206
 Prometheus 82
 Propertius 67 n. 3
prosbolê 161
 Proyas, Alex 87
 Ps-Basil of Caesarea 76 n. 28
 Psellos, Michael 84 n. 48
psyche *see* soul
 purification 12, 19, 20, 44–50, 58, 96–98,
 157, 177–78, *see also* catharsis
 Pyrrho of Elis 92

raison d'être 196
 realism 5, 12, 25, 46, 168, 217–226
 reality TV 70
 reality 106, 123–25, 128–31, 160, 183, 214,
 217, 219
 reflection vii, 20, 29, 31, 67–72, 84, 108, 118,
 203–205
 Rembrandt 224–25
 Remes, Pauliina 99
 representation 125
 rhetoric 76–77, 79, 158, 169
 rhythm 46, 76, 115, 126
 rituals 73, 78–79
 Rogers, Sheena 155
Roma Città Aperta 129
 Romans 75
 Rome 82
 Ropars-Wuilleumier, Marie-Claire 23
 Russian Formalists *see* Formalists

 Sartre, Jean-Paul 91, 99–100
 existentialism 91, 99
 freedom 99–100
schemata 75
 Schrader, Paul 154
 Schwarzenegger, Arnold 83
 science fiction 73, 86
 science 167
 Scipio 85
 seer and the seen 42, 182
 self 82, 187, 188, 193–97, 198, 200, 202–203,
 204, 205, 206, 207
 identity 195–96, 202, 203, 206, 207
 self-awareness 108
 self-determination 91, 98, 99–102
 self-knowledge 195, 196, 200, 202–3
sema 200
 Seneca 68
 sequence 123–24, 126, 135, 168
 Silver Age 46
 simplicity 14–15, 20, 30, 49–52, 220–21, 212
 simulacra *see* *eidolon*
 singularity 86
 Siren 120
 Skakov, Nariman 238
 skepticism 91–92
 Pyrrhonian 92
 Skeptical Academy 92
 Cartesian 91–92, 96
 Slow Cinema (Contemplative Cinema)
 6, 9–11, 15, 16, 118–21, 211, 224–27
 slow motion 10, 155
 slowness 9–11, 46, 60–61, 154, 211
 Socrates 82–83, 87

- Sol Indigenes of Rome 78
 Sol Invictus 78
 soul vii, 2–3, 39–40, 44, 49 n. 1, 81, 91, 95–96,
 102–3, 106, 131, 144–47, 153, 187, 189, 191,
 193–95, 199, 202, 205–6, 214–16, 229
 dual-aspect theory 6, 91, 96
 dual-selfhood 91, 95–98, 102
 inward return vii, 96, 97, 99, 102–3
 space 155, 171, 194, 200, 233, 236–37, 240–41
 spectacle 162
 spectator 39, 146–48
 Spinoza, Baruch 4, 153
 spiritual 14–15, 24, 44, 46, 50, 113, 179, 180–83,
 236
spoudaios 98
 statues, divine 72–74, 78, 79
 moving 81, 84
 Stoicism 92, 134, 153, 179, 230
 stylization 25
 subjectivity 8, 10–11, 159, 229
 substance 23, 80, 109, 124, 132, 161
 Sun, god 78, 79, 83
 suspension of judgment 92–93
 symbol 21, 23, 47, 74, 78, 84, 109 n. 12, 117,
 168–70, 169 n. 14
 Syria 221

 Tarkovsky, Andrei 5, 8, 9, 9 n. 2, 19, 44–48,
 50, 52–54, 57–60, 154, 158–59, 165–78,
 234, 237–38
 Tempo di Viaggio 47
 Andrei Rublyov 45, 52, 59, 172, 175
 Stalker 58, 60, 61, 175
 Solaris (Tarkovsky) 45, 59, 172 n. 22
 Ivan's Childhood 45, 59
 Nostalghia 46, 58, 170 n. 17, 175, 179, 184
 Mirror vii, 2, 46, 59, 174
 The Sacrifice 44, 170 n. 17, 176, 180, 184
 Tarr, Béla 5, 16, 20, 154
thauma 181–83
The Godfather 130–31
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly 128
The Incredible Shrinking Man 86
The Last Action Hero 69 n. 11, 70, 83
The Searchers 116–17
The Seventh Seal 140
 theatricality 201–2, 205

 Theocritus 67 n. 3
 theophany 231
theoria 12, *see also* contemplation
Through a Glass Darkly 141
Through the Looking Glass 69 n. 11
 Thucydides 77
 Thyestes 76
 time 1–2, 16, 153, 195, 205–6, 231–32
 time and eternity 1–2
 moving image 1–2, 3, 6, 39, 41, 124, 138,
 173, 219, 223–24
 temporality 200, 203, 205, 220
 Timocrates 77
 Tolkien, J. R. R. 81 n. 41, 117
 trace 234
 tragedy 239
 transcendence 91, 94, 96, 101, 103, 126, 129
 transfiguration 58
 transparency 183
Truman Show, The 6, 69, 81, 83, 91–95,
 97–103

 Underworld 69 n. 11, 82
Unforgiven 128

 Vespasian, Emperor 78
 Virgil 67 n. 3
 virtual 4, 73, 91, 94, 98, 127, 241
 virtue 74, 79–80, 97, 98, 99–101, 178
 Vishnu 72
 vision 163

 water ix, 36, 44, 47, 54, 59–61, 67, 69, 82,
 184–85
 Weir, Peter 6, 91, 99
 Williams, Charles 79, 81
 wisdom 19, 23, 78, 101, 161, 163, 178,
 190 n. 7
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 74 n. 24, 192
 Wong, Kar-wai 21, 154–55

X-Men 70
 Xenophanes 5
 Xenophon 82

 Zen 170
 Zeus 72, 82, 83